

Hiking the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT)

So you were going to hike the PCT, but apparently the activity stopped at 140 miles... what happened?

It is clearly possible that the more accurate question would be, 'what didn't happen'?

My trail permit date was April the 26th, so on the 25th my sister dragged me over to the Back Country Inn, which at the time I thought was the closest lodging to Campo, CA, the location of the PCT Southern Terminus (ST).



Morning of the 26th, I checked in with the PCT ST host, and at the time he asked me how much water I had, I told him 3 liters, and his body language clearly communicated that he didn't think that was near enough. I was to later discover just how accurate he was. I now wish he'd have been a little more forthcoming on the 'quantity of water issue.'

Nevertheless, he wasn't, and so I happily embarked down the 2650-mile trail, with only my 3 precious liters in tow.

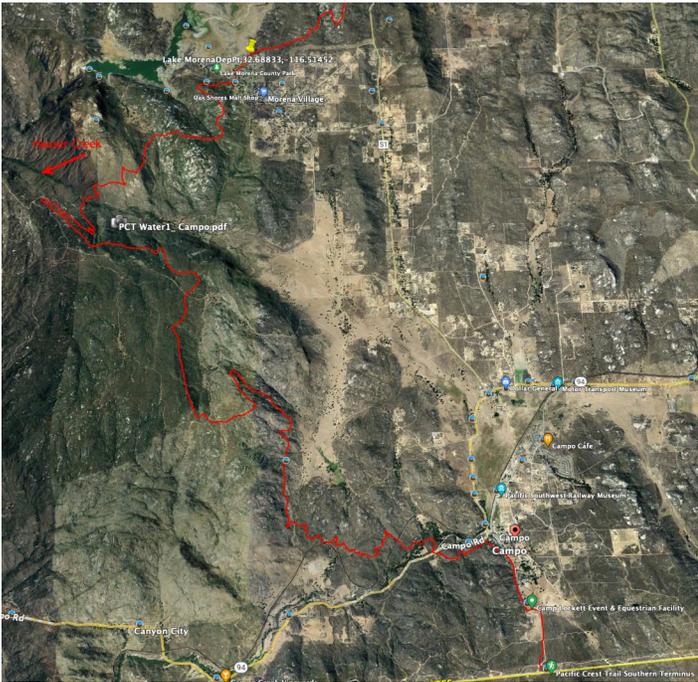
At the time, CA was having somewhat of a heat wave, so much so that at some later point there were people bailing off the trail due to the heat.

So it was a bit slow-going for me as well due to the heat, and I arrived at Hauser Canyon (about 14 miles) right about when dark was really taking hold. I had passed up the few camping spots prior to the canyon as they were all occupied. At some point high on the canyon, the trail hits a road, and you must road-walk for a short distance, then quickly find the trail which travels all the way to the bottom of this drainage. *However*, as I already noted dark was getting firmly 'settled in', and the sign that annotated where the trail began was next to invisible under those conditions. Therefore, I mistakenly hiked almost down to the bottom of the drainage, realized that any further progress was going to have to wait for tomorrow's light, so set up camp in the dark, and quickly drifted into dreamland.



In the morning, I spent the time to research what had happened, i.e., like where/how I had missed the trail, and the outcome of that little bit of reconnoitering convinced me that I had to hike all the way to the top of the drainage again, discover the trail, then hike all the way back down. Not an ideal solution, but it just looked too brushy to attempt to go off trail over to the other side of the drainage.

After trudging back up to where the trail takes off back to the drainage, and finding my way down to Hauser Creek, one of the places that there was



Campo to Lake Morena

supposed to be water, I discover what others before me had, and that is that the 10 years or so of drought have dried up many of the places that had previously been reliable water access points. As I will relate later in this narrative, in this environment, that can be potentially life-threatening. And as it turned out, I had to accept two different offers of water from folks that were hiking up behind me as I was nearly to zero. I am keenly aware that you should never have to rely on others to keep hydrated. It is 100% up to the individual to access enough water when it is available as it is hardly a secret that there are many stretches on the PCT where there are very long water carries. I beat myself up plenty over that one, and I am afraid that later I was still not carrying enough for the heat, and for the lack of water. Some of us appear to be slow learners, and I apparently am the visual aid.

From the bottom of Hauser Canyon it is around a 1200-foot climb, then about 8 miles to Lake Morena, the first stop on the trail with good water and a good campground just for PCT hikers. I didn't get there until 3 pm or so, and therefore naturally decided to camp overnight. I therefore took advantage of the local restaurant and filled my 3 liters (which still should have been more).

Next morning, I trudged on, and by the time I got to Boulder Oaks CG, another 6 miles, I was struggling again. I'm not sure why, but I'm supposing that it



Boulder Oaks Campground

was either nutrition or hydration. By this point, I was sufficiently discouraged and called my sister for a ride. I am not clear as to why I am so willing to throw in the towel, but it is clear that for me, it is a real challenge for me to keep going when the going gets to be tough going.

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May 6th, 2022: Along the lines of the descriptive saying, "...that when you are up to your ass in alligators, it is difficult to remember that your original objective was to drain the swamp", it is always easier for me to think things through when I am not in the middle of the wilderness. And so after much thought about the reasons for my trail troubles, I decided to take another shot at it. Therefore, I had my sister take me to ABQ, I flew to San Diego, RON'ed there, and the next morning took the shuttle back to Boulder Oaks CG, picking

up where I had previously left off. This day took me to within about 3 miles of Mt. Laguna.



Mt. Laguna Lodge/Post Office

The next morning, I quickly hiked the short distance to Mt. Laguna Lodge, where I had a resupply box I had mailed to the PO, and a store to augment what I had in the box. It was nice to get my stuff re-supplied, but the proprietor of the store was a bit of a crabapple, so leaving the area had a nice sound to it.

At Mt. Laguna you are at the 42.1 mile point on the PCT. New clothes, new food, and so my energy was resupplied as well. New threads and food does that. I motored on and for just a brief period I was in a pine forest like what I am used to in Idaho, and life was good. That ended all too quickly and I was back to a rocky trail, and classic CA desert plants. I want to call them chaparral, but I could be well shy of

the mark on that one. Also, along with the desert plants, came a very strong, gusty wind. So much so that when it gave you a



Classic CA hillside vegetation

blast, it would throw you sideways into the plants along the trail, so you had to stop, reorient yourself, and then start going again. That was a fun section to hike. It was a long day/afternoon, and when the time came to be looking for a spot to camp for the night, they seemed to be in very scarce supply. I finally, just before dark, stumbled into a relatively flat drainage, and up went the tent. Sadly, due to fatigue and the time of day, dinner was not in the cards, and as soon as I could get horizontal, I did!

Next morning, it was relatively good hiking, except as it had been doing all week, it got quite hot later in the day. I had previously made the decision to RON in Julian, CA, since I desperately needed nutrition and had skipped dinner the night before. Julian is a great hiker town they said. Julian is hiker friendly, they said. Free pie for hikers at Mom's café they said. **HOGWASH.**

I arrived in Julian, found a place to stay, and went downtown looking for a place to eat. Although it was Mother's day, there didn't seem to be much open except the Julian Grille. Upon entering it seemed to be kind of a upscale place, cloth tablecloths and the like. So I stood waiting to be served for quite some time... then I sat in the entryway for quite



Looks friendly enough, eh. An example that things are not always what they seem.

a bit more time. I'm apparently kind of slow, but finally it dawned on me that they simply were not going to have anything to do with this hiker. Truly I was a bit scruffy, but who comes in from the trail in pristine condition? Or carries an evening wardrobe with them? Hiker friendly, right? Not to this hiker.

So, since I couldn't find another place to eat, it boiled down to chips and dip. At least the market was hiker friendly. As you can see, nutrition took the back seat to necessity. But tomorrow there will be breakfast at Mom's... and free pie!

Un huh. Next day, up reasonably early. Trundled down to Mom's... and what the!! Mom's doesn't open until 9am. 9AM?? What kind of a breakfast place opens at 9AM?!?!

So, back to the trail, with nutrition taking a back seat to the 'hiker friendly' environs of Julian.

Got a ride back to the trail and began one of the more difficult couple of days. As you can see from the picture, it is a section with no shade. Note: I didn't say, 'a little shade', but **NO** shade. No respite for all the hours I was on this section of the trail. The road below this section of mountains, S2-San Felipe Road, was what I had to look at for one and a half days. You felt like you had stepped into the twilight zone and you were going to be marching here for eternity. The one delightful exception to all of this is that when it came time to set up a tent, there was a primo place to do so, and the wind did NOT blow all night like it does in many cases. Was a great night.

The next day was sort of a long slog, but not a lot of uphill and ended with a long moderate downhill at the end where you came to water and the Barrel Springs TH.

It was at this point that I chose to bail again. For



some reason, my feet were hurting like mad, which had not happened ever since I began hiking in running shoes, with very expensive inserts. What made it easy to bail was the fact that I struggled for many, many years with my hiking due to my feet getting very painful after a few miles, and therefore I figured that there was not a lot of choice.

What I should have done in retrospect was camped for the night, even maybe taking a day off, and keep trucking. But as I noted before, I don't seem to be able to think things through in the grip of situations like these.

I began hiking up the road, got a ride down to Borrego Springs, CA, and, once again, waited for my ride.

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June 4, 2022:

With no more to go on than the fact that I just cannot seem to give up this PCT thing, which I have



wanted to do for a very large part of my adult life I have once again talked my sister into taking me back over to CA to once again continue hiking the trail where I left off the last time. And yes, this is my third attempt at making a go at this.

So, 9am or so, I began hiking on the north side of the road at Barrel Springs. This is one of the prettier and easier sections of the PCT to hike. The only thing that took the edge off is that there was no shade for quite a while, and it was quite hot. On the north side of this area, there were quite a number trees, read: SHADE!, and some picnic tables left over from what apparently used to be a campground. Since I had a picnic table at my disposal, I took advantage of that opportunity to

make my dinner so I didn't have to do it later on the ground. As I was finishing up dinner, along came



Gilbert and Elizabeth from Quebec. They turned out to be a delightful couple and we hiked together until RON time, as well as the entirety of the next day.

After dinner, Gil, Elizabeth and I crossed Warner Springs road, rejoined the PCT and hiked quite a ways up into the hills until we came across a very nice camp spot. We did the filtering of the water, but the water, even filtered, had quite an unpleasant taste, and the next day, as we were leaving the campsite, we found a natural spring, so Gil & Liz dumped the previous night's water and refilled their containers with what was a whole lot more palatable liquid.

Turned out to be a long, hot day, and when we finally reached a campsite at the top of a ridge, at 33.363944,-116.605523, and after some discussion, Gil & Liz let me know that they were going to turn around, return to Warner Springs, and leave the trail for this year. The heat we were having, which was unpleasant at best, was a lot more difficult for them as coming from Ottawa, Canada, they just we not acclimated to the kind of temperatures we were seeing, high 90s I believe. That was a real bummer, as I really was enjoying their company, but I certainly do understand the heat thing.

Next morning I had breakfast, watched Gil & Liz head on back down the hill, and then I reluctantly turned north and continued on the trail.

My next destination was Mike's Place, where there is water to be had, and where I filled up all my containers. It was only 4 miles or so to Mikes, and having taken on all the water I could fit in my bottles, I headed on intending to stay at Tule Spring, where the Guthook app said that there was reliable water.

It was a long hot day, a lot of ups and downs, and seeing Tule Spring ahead was an ever so welcome

sight. That is until I realized that this 'reliable' water WASN'T. There wasn't a drop of moisture to be had, which put me in a very, very bad position. I had only ½ a liter of water left, and the next reliable water (I thought, turned out to be some quite a bit closer) was a full day away. I agonized plenty about that, but there just wasn't any good solutions. Mike's Place was a full day back, so there was no choice but to keep making footprints.

Since I knew that I was clearly in deep doo doo, I got up at the first sign of light on the horizon, packed up with a headlamp, and headed out to make as much time as I could before the sun really got around to drilling.

Probably about 10-11 am, I noticed my breaks becoming more and more frequent and I was beginning to consider what I was going to do, since I knew that there was the very real potential for me to actually 'fall out'.

The last thing, and I do mean the LAST thing I wanted to do was push the 'Rescue' button, but I knew I needed water, *SOON*, and thought that when I communicated that all I needed was water, there might be someone that could bring some out.

'I'm sorry sir but your naïveté is showing'

So I eventually pressed the SOS. I was communicating through the InReach Explorer, and I told them I just needed water. They started talking about a helicopter and I shot back, "NO, NO, NO!! I don't want a helicopter, I JUST NEED WATER. Well, the air machine was already on its way and it was a done deal. When they arrived and the sheriff rappelled down to me, I said the same thing I had been saying, with one addition. I knew what helicopter rides cost and I told him, I AM NOT PAYING FOR A HELICOPTER RIDE!!!!!! I just need water. His response to me was, "1) we are not a delivery service; & 2) the ride is free."

That cooled my jets a little, and I still didn't want a ride, but I DID need water so I went with the program. I drank a liter of water before we got to Mountain Center, and adamantly refused the ride to the hospital, which the ambulance boys were trying to convince me to take. I *knew* that I didn't need the hospital.

So the local sheriff drove me up to Idyllwild, and once again I called for a ride. Why didn't I just

continue? Sadly a question I cannot adequately answer.

I am now home again, and lack the funds to travel to CA again (about 530 miles), at least until the first of October. September is a wash because of a number of things that will keep me here. Wha? Would you really attempt this nonsense again? I might.

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8-6-22: I had been watching the weather in the area of CA that I was going to need to hike in, Mt. San Jacinto in particular (since it is very high, and the bloody PCT goes very close to right over the top of it), and although there was a chance of t-storms in the prediction, they were all 20-30%, which in weather prognosticator terminology normally means there isn't much of a chance of it actually happening.

So off we go again, CA or bust.

However, when I got close enough to begin to see the backside of Mt. San Jacinto, what to my wondering eyes should appear, but the very clear appearance of t-storms over the mountains in the vicinity of the trail/TH in question. There are some very clear implications here, not the least of which is the question, 'if the weatherman is wrong about today, what about tomorrow and the next day. Also, since I was going to camp overnight in the area more or less covered by the activity on the mountains in question, do I really want to be in the middle of weather central?

Once we got to Rancho Mirage, the jump-off point for climbing up into the mountains where the trail/TH is located, it was clear that this area was being hammered by the storm(s) in question. Lightning was constant, and the mountains were invisible due to the amount of rain that was falling. So it was obvious that a motel in Rancho Mirage was the obvious fall-back position, with any decision vis-à-vis regarding venturing up into the mountains left until morning.

In the morning, after having spent a whole lot of time during the night considering the best plan of action, I made the difficult decision to RTB (Military jargon: Return to Base). Why would I turn around and drive home after coming all the way over here in the first place I wondered, and I suppose so did

my sister. It simply boiled down to my extreme sensitivity to getting caught in the great outdoors directly underneath a raging thunderstorm, the kind we were seeing when we drove in here. I have spent many hours in my Idaho hiking in a tent while a maelstrom raged above me, protection = Zero. One Idaho trip of 8 nights had 8 nights of lightning & thunder. We finally bailed on that one because it just got so wearisome.

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Epilogue #1: I am now out of the game until October. I really wanted to get the desert section out of the way, so next year I could begin in the vicinity of the Sierra and finally complete this nonsense.

Epilogue #2: I still don't seem to be willing to take on enough water (i.e., weight) to actually 'go-the-distance' in the desert sections of CA. If that doesn't change, I might as well pack it in for good. Eventually I will get hauled out of the wilderness again, and this time the ride won't be free. The one I am familiar with was \$65,000.

Epilogue #3: I still wonder why, especially in the desert country, isn't the rescue agencies response of a graduated nature? I, for instance, did NOT need the services of a very expensive helicopter. When I pressed the SOS button, I was thinking that someone could bring me some water. I was clearly very near, maybe only 1/2 mile from a road. It just makes more sense to me since we clearly could communicate exactly what I needed.