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So why did I end up in the mountains north of Pinos Altos, NM, freezing at 3 am in November? In fact, shouldn't I have put the hiking togs away for the winter this late in the calendar year?

Well, actually, no. It is possible to hike nearly year around here in southern NM. And so when the mood struck, it was exceptionally easy to tell myself that going into the mountains at 7500' or so was actually a good idea. That one is ripe for second thoughts, but at the time, 'second thoughts' were far, far away.

Since I have tried to do a section of the CDT whenever time and opportunity presented itself, another section of this trail seemed like a good idea. And since the CDT's Gila alternate is out of the question, well, unless you have a death wish, due to the high level of that river (which must be crossed many, many times doing this particular hike), and since much of the CDT is also closed in the Aldo Leopold Wilderness as the cleanup of the 385,000 acre Black Mountain fire is still continuing/closed, there wasn't a whole lot of the CDT that was left to focus upon in my immediate area.

Ultimately I decided that I would hike from NM15 (the route to the Gila Cliff Dwellings) to NM35, a route that would take you a little over 20 miles, a pretty modest undertaking. Well it seemed modest at the time, that is prior to actually considering the climb, the altitude you would be hiking at, and the really putrid footing found on much of this trail.

November 10th, off we go to the Arrastra Interpretive Site, the location on NM15 that the CDT passes through in its journey from Silver City to NM35 and beyond. Throwing on my pack it became immediately clear why I had purchased a new one for my PCT attempts. My old castaway was small, and horribly balanced, something I immediately noticed, especially after having carried my very nice relatively new ULA Circuit pack for quite a number of miles. Unfortunately, if I wanted to go hiking, Señor Castaway *was* the only game in town since the shoulder straps on my new pack had torn loose from their mounts on my last PCT adventure.

I should have remembered that we are at a CDT junction here, but I cleverly left that out of my current awareness equation, and so off I went, down what looked like the most likely direction of the CDT. Here we stop and consider: did I stop and consult my very expensive GPS device for the correct direction? No. Did I look at the Guthook* App on my very expensive smart phone to make sure I was going the right direction? No. Hey! I've done this stuff for a long time, I don't need no stupid electronics to show me where to go. How I would come to rue that little bit of empty-headedness later in this epistle.

Probably about 3 miles or so into this jaunt I got off trail, and when I got back to the trail I then had the presence of mind to consider that maybe Guthook had a pretty good idea of the 'right way' to head should I actually wanted to get to my planned destination. Sure enough, when I followed out the trail on the screen, it definitely showed me the way I needed to go.

However, at some point, the doubts began to creep in when I passed a piece of the trail that looked *very* familiar... then I passed another familiar spot... and another... and...

Finally it was patently clear that Guthook and my phone was taking me right back to where I started! At least this time I didn't question whether or not the phone had lost its semiconductor brain and I followed the electronic directions wondering if I had initially taken the very wrong branch of this bloody trail.

I had.

Back at the Arrastra site, while right direction to the north (i.e., correct) branch of this trail *was* clearly confusing, with the brain now engaged, instead of in park, it became clear that the branch of the trail that I needed went the other direction. And since it was still early, I passed what would be the last place to camp for a very long and difficult time. The trail from the Arrastra went up, around the mountain, then switch-backed up to near the top of the mountain before it flattened out. At that point there finally were suitable camp spots. And since I was well beyond used up in terms of further energy output, I hung the food, and put up the tent as all I could think about at that point was 'horizontal'. [At this point it is necessary to attach

a sidebar. And that is, that as someone that has a definite tendency to experience muscle spasms, do you suppose they raised their ugly head. Ya gotta ask? In spite of having about 12 hours at this time of year to 'horizontally' contemplate the error of my ways, I got precious little real rest as the sleep breaks only periodically interrupted the battle of the muscles. It was horrid]

Then, at about 3:30 am, in spite of the fact that I was wearing all the clothes I had, and had the sleeping bag cinched around my neck tight enough to cut off the windpipe, I was quite cold and shivering. It didn't take much of that to convince me that my best course of action was to get off this bloody mountain at first light. Which I did. And, as well, NOT to venture into the mountains until I had a better sleeping bag. Period.

