

What am I doing now?

One of the big topics of conversation as a thru-hike draws to a close is, "What are you going to do after you finish?" A common response is "I don't know, but I'm not going back to my old job!"

My old job was being a missionary in Peru; I live in a deep canyon, surrounded by high mountains, and got to go hiking all the time. Not too hard to go back to, which I hope to do soon. However, when I returned to Peru, I wanted to do one other thing first. I have started an adventure travel business – leading tours hiking, climbing and biking in Cotahuasi Canyon and the surrounding mountains. Once I get that established, I hope it will provide the income to support my, and other's, missionary work here. If you aren't ready to start your thru-hike right away, or maybe you have a few questions about it, come on down to Peru, and we can talk about it while I show you the beauty of Cotahuasi Canyon, one of the deepest canyons in the world. Please check out Adventure Cotahuasi Tours at our website at: <http://www.adventurecotahuasi.com> and then email me at VicHanson@adventurecotahuasi.com

For more information about Cotahuasi Canyon, I have a page on Summit Posts as well: http://www.summitpost.org/view_object.php?object_id=278312&confirm_post=7

There are lots of photos on both sites. Thanks!

Gear List

As an aid to those who might be considering a thru-hike, here is a list of the gear that I used, along with a few comments about how it worked for me. These are just my own personal preferences; you may prefer something different. I bought almost all new gear in an effort to get my pack weight as low as possible. I was by no means an ultra light hiker but did get rid of a few things as the hike progressed. (Not all of it on purpose!) I am 5' 7", and weighed about 155 pounds at the start of the hike.

Pack – Granite Gear Vapor Trail, medium, with optional lid.

Comfortable pack, sufficient room, fairly durable. The hip belt was too large after I lost a few pounds, I should have changed for a small belt. I tried to put my bear can horizontally inside, it fit but was too tight and pulled out a seam, my fault. I put the tent and sleeping pad on the outside.

Tent – Henry Shires Virga 2 Tarptent, with bathtub floor.

I used two trekking poles instead of a front tent pole. Good tent.

Sleeping bag – Marmot Helium 15° F., women's model

I chose the women's model because it was lighter, smaller and was on sale. Overall I was happy with it, but for much of the hike it was too hot and it only has a half zipper so couldn't open it up and use it like a quilt. I think I would try a 20° or 25° bag next time, possibly with a silk liner if needed for extra warmth.

Pad – Ridge Rest, ¾ length, replaced at Old Station for a new one due to compression.

Ground sheet – poncho at first, then painter's plastic drop cloth

Would use Tyvek next time.

Trekking Poles – Komperdell Compact Ultralight

Worked well, but be sure to carry extra tips – I needed to replace 3 of them. They don't wear out, the tips break off in the rocks.

Headlamp – Petzl Tikka Plus, with lithium batteries**Stove** – alcohol, soda can, with wire pot support and aluminum windshield

Number one choice in my opinion. I used HEET or denatured alcohol for fuel.

Pot – Evernew non-stick titanium, 1.3 L with lid**Bowl** – Ziploc plastic, 1.75 cup size, round with lid**Spoon** – Lexan**Knife** – Swiss Army, Classic, includes scissors**Water bottle** – Two Platypus, 2.4L, one drinking tube, two 1L Aqua Fina bottles**Water treatment** – Aquamira, McNett straw filter, Micropur MT20 tablets

Used a combination of the three, as well as no treatment, as explained in the journal.

Camera – Pentax Optio WP, 5 Mp, waterproof, four extra batteries, three MB memory

Great camera, lightweight, no worries, no problems. Charger in bounce box.

GPS – Garmin Legend

Just carried through the Sierras, used a few times for trail confirmation in the snow, otherwise just to check altitude.

Watch – Highgear altimeter, no compass

It was cheaper than a Suunto and compared well in accuracy.

Email device – Pocketmail, with lithium batteries

Was very happy with it, used it the whole way with no problems.

Bear can – Bearvault BV400

Used from Kennedy Meadows until Sonora Pass. Placed it on top of the pack, held on with straps.

Crampons – Camp 6 point light

Never used, lost soon after entering the Sierras.

Ice Axe – Black Diamond

Carried it from Kennedy Meadows to Sonora Pass, usually on my pack.

Clothing

T-Shirt – Duofold, wicking, two short sleeve, one long sleeve

Campmor has them, very cheap and durable.

Pants/Shorts – Homemade convertible, also with mesh legs for mosquitoes

I bought Starter nylon shorts and added the legs using Velcro. I started carrying two pair, later put one pair in bounce box. Very quick drying, and surprisingly warm. I didn't carry any wind pants or use long underwear when hiking.

Shirt – Long sleeve polyester, convertible sleeves; mesh sleeves for mosquitoes.

I bought a long sleeve shirt, made it convertible using Velcro. I wore it some on cool mornings and then could take off the sleeves when I warmed up. The mosquito mesh worked well until it got too many holes in it from brush and thorns. I need to find more durable netting; I just used regular mesh for women's clothing.

Long underwear – Lightweight Tellamar silk, top and bottom

Used when sleeping to keep bag clean and for warmth. They were very light but not very durable, lots of runs. Replaced bottoms with polyester ones in Tahoe, used Duofold T-Shirts for top.

Underwear – Life by Jockey, boxer briefs, polyester/Spandex**Liner socks** – Wal-Mart nylon dress socks, tan color

Socks – Starter Cool Max low crew socks with low shoes, higher socks with boots. I also used Fox River Lightweight Hikers some, I had used them extensively for my training hikes, and really liked them, but they were too hot for the desert, and held too much water after stream crossings and in the snow. They are great socks for normal dry hiking. Next time I might try some waterproof socks for the Sierras, and remove them for deeper stream crossings. I usually ended up stopping and wringing out my socks after crossings anyway.

Shoes – Dunham Nimble 905, low, lots of mesh, used Mexico to Seiad Valley Still had blisters, wore through streams and snow, used three pairs but could have made it with two. The last pair was too wide and my feet got really sore from lack of support.

Shoes – Dunham Waffle Stomper Terrastryder 616, used Seiad Valley to Manning Park Mid height, supposed to be waterproof but were not; they had good support, wore one pair for 1,000 miles but they were pretty well trashed by then.

Jacket – Montbell Down Inner Jacket, snap closure, no pockets or hood

Very happy with this, only 7.4 ounces but kept me warm in the evenings and mornings in camp, never wore hiking, it was too hot.

Wind Shell – Montane Featherweight Jacket, pullover, half zipper, no pockets or hood Would prefer a full zipper to open it up when hiking, I got too hot with it, but was cool without it, on cool breezy days. Usually this and the down jacket were sufficient in camp, rarely needed to add a long sleeve shirt.

Hat – Broad brimmed hat from Peru, stocking cap, balaclava

I wore the hat all the time when hiking, with a rain cover when needed. The stocking cap was for camp in the evening, for sleeping and for a pot cozy when making dinner. I never used the balaclava, sent it home after the Sierras.

Gloves – Cheap nylon or polyester, not waterproof

This was my greatest mistake in gear; I didn't get good waterproof gloves. They soaked up the slightest moisture, didn't dry and didn't keep my hands warm when wet. I would get some good waterproof gloves for a future hike. I also used wool ½ finger gloves around camp in the evening, for cooking and especially when using Pocketmail.

Gaiters – Mountain Hardware Nut Shell, low, Velcro closure

I wore these until the Sierras, stopped wearing them due to the many stream crossings. They were nice for protection from the snow but too much trouble to take them off and put back on for stream crossings. I lost them the first week in the Sierras and never got them replaced. I regretted that later on some of the sandy trails, also for stickers on Hat Creek Rim, etc. I replaced the cord foot strap with wire cable in Idyllwild.

Rain wear – I started with a Campmor poncho that was made to go over the pack as well, but it didn't work for me if there was any wind, even with extra snaps on the sides. Maybe a belt or tie would have helped. I also used it for a ground sheet under my tent. After losing it around VVR, I used a large garbage bag for a poncho/pack cover the only rainy day until Seiad Valley, then received my old North Face rain jacket, coated nylon, not breathable. With its full zipper, I was usually able to adjust it enough to keep dry from the rain and sweating. The legs of my pants were made of polyester lining material, very lightweight, quick drying and surprisingly warm. I didn't carry rain or wind pants.

One other thing, I didn't start with any stuff sacks, in order to save weight and money. I had a few turkey roaster bags for food, clothes and my sleeping bag. I also used plastic grocery bags for food and clothes. I ended up buying one stuff sack for my food, should have gotten a couple more. The roaster bags were not very durable but were nice to see what was inside. I ended up using 1-gallon zipper type plastic bags for clothes; they

worked well. I didn't use anything for my sleeping bag, just stuffed it in the bottom of the pack. I had the large garbage bag for a pack liner but never used it for that. I did use it to put my pack inside of to cross Evolution Creek, which was over our heads. I also used the ground sheet as a pack cover after I got my rain jacket.

Food and Meals

Here is what worked for me.

Breakfast – Grape Nuts (generic is fine) with powdered milk, whole if possible (all the Wal-Mart's I have been to have had it, also available in Mexican food stores or the Mexican section of large super markets). If I used non-fat milk, I added instant non-dairy creamer, mix the dry ingredients first and then add the water, as creamer doesn't mix well in cold water. For variety and more flavor, add instant pudding mix, banana was my favorite. I also ate some instant oatmeal, especially if it was in the hiker boxes, but usually didn't "cook" for breakfast. If I did heat water for oatmeal, I also had tea or hot chocolate.

Lunch – Small (3 3/4 oz. I think) packages of sandwich meat – ham, turkey or beef, put on two bagels or flour tortillas, with cheese. The meat packs are less than \$1.00 each and are often on sale if you buy store brands. The name brand is Bud something. They will easily keep for five days or more, as long as they are unopened. I had two packs go bad at just over a week's time, on the whole trip. When I had to mail food ahead, I used jars of dried beef (Hormel is one brand, can't remember the other). The problem with this is that you have to leave it in the jar. If you repackage it, it won't keep, so you have to pack out the empty jars. Use within three or four days after opening.

Something different: Take a little plastic jar of honey and put it on tortillas and cheese, I wouldn't try it at first, but finally did and it was great! Thanks Swiss Miss.

Dinner – Instant mashed potatoes, add powdered milk, a bunch of cheese and bacon bits, real or imitation. Or save a little meat from lunch and add that. Don't forget the salt. If I didn't have cheese to add, I got tired of instant potatoes real quick; with the cheese, I never got tired of it. I did use Butter Buds some, as well as liquid margarine at the beginning. Swiss Miss had cooking oil that they didn't use; I also added that, mainly for the calories.

I usually took cheddar cheese, two lbs. for five to seven days, but also bought Swiss if it was on sale, or Monterrey Jack. It can be mailed ahead for at least a month if you don't open the package. Parmesan is nice too; use it in the potatoes or on macaroni and cheese.

I took some macaroni and cheese and usually ended up carrying it for weeks, or until I ran out of potatoes. When I had liquid margarine it was fine, after I quit carrying that I couldn't eat much of it.

Repeat the above every day you are on the trail! Variety comes at the town stops!

Snacks – The 2 most important words - LITTLE DEBBIE!! The crème filled oatmeal cookies (pies?) are the best. They come in two sizes. The small box has smaller cookies, the large box has bigger cookies, I think the big ones had 390 calories each. Wal-Mart and large super markets have the large boxes. I ate two to four cookies a day. I also ate Little Debbie's fudge brownies, not great but kind of like fudge, got to tasting a bit like plastic after a few months.

Generic (store brands like Albertertson or Vons) chewy oatmeal bars with chocolate chips, I liked them better than the Quaker Oatmeal ones, which usually came in a variety pack. Also ate some generic raspberry bars for variety. I ate a lot of Honey Bunches of Oats cereal (usually generic) dry, just as snack food through out the day. Very good.

Fig bars were great but too expensive for me unless I could get generics in a large super market. Wal-Mart's are real cheap and my favorite taste/texture.

For all of the above - **Be Very Careful** not to get the low fat or reduced sugar variety! It happened a few times. You need the calories and taste, why carry the weight if it doesn't have the calories?

I started with Pay Day candy bars, they have lots of nuts and caramel, are salty, and they don't melt in the heat. However I got tired of them after a few months and switched to mostly Snickers. Ate one or two a day, after awhile it was the king size bars. The only power bar type things I ate were those I found in hiker boxes.

Drink mixes – I used some generic Kool Aid mix and whatever was in the hiker boxes, otherwise just plain water. My favorite tea was Celestial Seasonings Raspberry tea, great in the evening with dinner, as the caffeine in regular tea sometimes kept me awake.

In town my favorite was to go to a super market with a deli and have a roast beef and cheese sandwich. About the same price as Subway, and much better (IMHO). Usually \$4 or \$5 for a large sandwich. Really hungry? Get a whole hot roast chicken for about \$6 in most super markets. Top it off with a ½ gallon of chocolate chip cookie dough ice cream.

Another great snack was the large muffins, usually chocolate chip or banana nut, like the ones Sam's Club or Costco have. Many large groceries stores have them too, as well as some of the smaller places. We got them at Kennedy Meadows, Hyatt Lake Resort and Ollalie Lake Resort to mention a few places I remember.

I lost weight the first two months or so, and then started eating more, mostly the same food, but more snacks, and gained some of it back. We stopped every two hours for a short break and to eat. Eat on the go if you don't need or want to stop, but we found we needed to eat every two hours, even after breakfast or lunch.

HYOH, YMMV, EYOF (eat your own food), IMHO of course. For what it is worth, eating is not an adventure for me, I find what I like and stick with it. I ate Grape Nuts for breakfast every morning for about 15 years. Had to switch to Angel Zuck (frosted corn flakes) here in Peru, Grape Nuts are not available.

Re-supply

My original strategy was wherever possible to buy my food along the way, after my first mail drop at Warner Springs. I would not do a drop there in the future. However from just after Big Bear to Seiad Valley I hiked with or near go-Big. His dad and other family members were meeting him regularly to re-supply him, and they graciously did the same for me, and others who were with him. We would give them our grocery lists, or whatever we needed, and they would have it for us at the next meeting spot. If we were meeting them near a larger town, they would drive us to the store to re-supply. A great strategy, I highly recommend it! We did a re-supply in Beldon Town, not great but it was possible.

After Seiad Valley, I bought food at Ashland, and shipped from there for all of Oregon. In Cascade Locks, I bought food and shipped for most of Washington. I did buy some food in a few places. Use the shipping information in Yogi's book; it is great. Mike's wife also did some re-supply and meals for us in Washington, which was a big help.

Without "family" support, I would re-supply on trail, and use the buy and ship strategy for places that didn't have good stores. Again, Yogi's book has all the information you need for this.

Resources

Because I was living in Peru while I was planning my hike, I did everything by Internet. The email lists were a big help, especially the Yahoo one for the current year hikers, 2006 in my case. The PCT-L can be good, lots of experienced thru-hikers on there; you just need to put up with a lot of garbage as well. I also bought almost all my gear online, except for a few last minute items that I got at REI.

PCT-L – <http://mailman.backcountry.net/mailman/listinfo/pct-l>

Yahoo 2007 Group – <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/PCT2007/>

(Just change the year to the year you are hiking and there should be a current group.)

The Pacific Crest Trail Association – www.pcta.org

This is the clearinghouse for most of the information and help you need. They issue the thru-hiker permit that is good for the whole hike, so you don't need to get individual permits for each park or wilderness area. It is free for members, cheap for non-members. They also have the Wilderness Press Guide Books available, the Data Book, maps and various other books, CDs and Videos about the PCT. They have a lot of information on the site, and links to other sites. Check it out first and then go from there. You can put a link to your journal site in their trail journals section.

Wilderness Press PCT Guide Books

There are three books, one for Southern California, one for Northern California, and one for Oregon and Washington. They give a complete description of the route, lots of extra information (geology, animals, flowers and history) and a detail map of the whole trail. These are really the only maps you need. They are only in black and white, and only cover a narrow section on both sides of the trail, but they are sufficient unless you really get lost. Keep the maps out and look at them often, and you will know where you are. Use a plastic map case around your neck, or a baggie like I did. If the maps are in your pocket, you won't know where you are on the map when you need to know. The new editions, as they come out, are supposed to have UTM's to use with a GPS, the old ones do not have them.

Read the information sections in the evening, at breaks, or anytime you are unsure about the route. You will not normally use it while hiking; the maps and Data Book are usually sufficient, supplemented by pages from Yogi's handbook.

Pacific Crest Trail Data Book

This is a digest of the mileage and distance marks in the Guide Books. Have this on the other side of the map, in your map case. It is not essential, but is a lot easier than following all the points in the Guide Book. The Data Book is not sufficient by itself; it doesn't give any details, just the points that the Guide Books list. For example, it will tell you the distance between point A and point B, the elevation at each point and the grade up or down between the points. What it will not tell you is that even though the overall grade might be down, there is a 2,000-foot climb in between the points. That you will only find out from the Guide Book, the maps, or experience.

It is a good idea to estimate your hiking time between points, based on the grade and your experience, and then you will know when to be looking for the next waypoint. As you get used to this, then you will know how long it is to the next water, your planned lunch spot and a suitable camping spot. Pang even went through the whole Data Book ahead of time, and marked each waypoint on the map. One final note, many of the waypoints are very ambiguous, like – Jeep trail, faint jeep trail, old unmarked trail, view of Mt. San Jacinto (of many views), or similar descriptions. These can be almost impossible to pinpoint just from the description, unless you know the elevation that you are at, so that you can compare it with what the Data Book says. I consider a good altimeter watch an essential piece of gear for hiking the PCT.

Yogi's PCT Handbook – <http://www.pcthandbook.com/>

Not essential, but almost! Use this to plan your hike, your re-supply strategy, and where to send drop boxes and bounce boxes if you are using them. It has the Post Office addresses, hours, maps of the re-supply towns, trail angels, places to stay, who accepts drop boxes, the charge if any, and whether to use US Mail or UPS. It also has water information and is updated every year so tends to be more accurate than the other guidebooks. There are two sections, one to use for pre-trip planning, and one to carry with you on the hike. I kept these pages between the maps and Data Book pages in my map case. Yogi's book is made to be used; it is a loose-leaf book so you don't have to cut it up! She even tells you how to divide up the books, what pages to take for each section. One of the many good things about her book is it not only has her opinion and advice, but that of many other hikers as well. And the contributors all explain their hiking and re-supply strategy, so you know how that compares with your own.

Pacific Crest Trail Town Book

I have heard that it is out of date, have never used it, or even looked at it.

Tom Harrison Maps – <http://www.tomharrisonmaps.com/>

These are beautiful color maps that cover the JMT, but a larger area on both sides of the trail, therefore are not as detailed. They do have UTM's on them so are good for GPS use. Go-Big had the maps and I had a GPS in the Sierras. We used them a few times to find the trail in the snow and to pinpoint our location, or to see which direction the correct pass was at. Nice and useful, but not normally necessary.

Some people used a variety of other maps, US Forest Service, AAA or other regular state road maps, etc. Again, nice, but not necessary.

ADZPCTKO – <http://siechert.org/adz/>

Don't let the controversy scare you off – it is great! Start earlier and hitch back, start later or start at the KO, but you will learn a lot, get to know great people and have a good time if you go. Go to the KO even if you aren't planning on a thru-hike right away. It will give you the motivation to start planning for one in the future.

Gear Sources

Because of my situation, I bought almost all of my gear online at Campmor and Backcountry Gear, and a couple of specialty vendors, plus some at REI. However don't neglect your local outfitter as well, especially if they cater to the lightweight philosophy. It is great to try on the pack, shoes, check the fit of the sleeping bag, etc. Just don't let them sell you a six-pound pack that will hold 60 pounds of stuff, like a zero degree sleeping bag and a five-pound tent!

A quick word about lightweight gear and philosophy. You will enjoy hiking more if you are carrying a lighter pack, and you have the right gear to keep you warm and dry. If you think you need 50 pounds of gear to be safe and comfortable, check out some of the new lightweight gear and I think you will be pleasantly surprised. Of course the trade off is price, usually lighter weight means a higher cost, and often less durable. But a good guideline for starting is that your "big three" (pack, sleeping bag and tent) should weigh six pounds or less. Mine were 5½ pounds, six pounds including sleeping pad.

Campmor – www.campmor.com

Huge selection of items

Backcountry Gear – www.backcountrygear.com

High quality and large selection – packs, clothes, sleeping bags, and much more

REI – www.rei.com

Henry Shires Tarptent – www.tarptent.com

Lightweight backpacking tents, lots of links as well

BearVault – www.bearvault.com

Bear resistant food container, doubles as a camp seat

Sierra Trading Post – www.sierratradingpost.com

Limited selection but great sales

Others that I have not used, but are highly recommended by other Thru-hikers are:

Six Moon Designs – <http://www.sixmoondesigns.com/>

ULA Equipment – <http://www.ula-equipment.com/>

Other Online Resources

California Fire Permit – <http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/lospadres/documents/campfirepermit.pdf>

Summit Post – The Pacific Crest Trail (special object)

Backpacking Lightweight – <http://www.backpacking.net/>
Lots of lightweight backpacking info.

Trail Journals – Has journals of current and past hiker, great for getting a feel of a thru-hike from many different people.
<http://www.trailjournals.com/journals.cfm?sort=&year=2007&trail=Pacific%20Crest%20Trail>

Magnet's PCT website – <http://adventureonthepect.com/>
Lots of helpful information, links and online forum

Postholer – <http://postholer.com/>
Snow and other hiker information

Scott Williamson – <http://www.pctthruhiker.com/>

AsABat's Water List – <http://4jeffrey.com>

Craig's Trip Planner – <http://www.pctplanner.com/>

Power's Fuel Mailing Info. – http://www.gottawalk.com/shipping_fuel.htm

Paul Magnanti – <http://www.pmags.com/joomla/index.php>
Go to "site map" for PCT info

The following have nothing to do with preparation for a PCT hike, except to maybe get you pumped up and excited about doing one.

Squatch's Walking DVDs – <http://www.walkpct.com/>

Annual Hiker's DVDs – ask on the PCT email lists, someone may make you a copy

My PCT Calendars – <http://stores.lulu.com/store.php?fAcctID=955979>
Some calendars made from my PCT thru-hike photos.

How to Pay for a Thru-hike

You might be all excited about a thru-hike but don't know how you could get the time off work, or how you would pay for one if you aren't working! First of all, how important is a thru-hike to you? Are you willing to do with less now so that you can save money for the hike?

Ask for a leave of absence if you want to go back to your old job. Or just quit and go! After the hike you probably won't want to go back to your old job anyway. Sell your house, your motor home or boat. You won't need them when you get back, because you will be busy planning for your next thru-hike! So how do you pay for your second thru-hike, especially if you don't have a job? Start an adventure travel business, do hiking seminars, write a book about your hike, sell your photos, make calendars for sale, try something different!

Do you have a wife and kids? Stay home and wait until the kids are old enough to do it with you! We met a family in the Sierras hiking together; they do the JMT every year as a family. On their first JMT hike, their younger daughter was the youngest girl to ever thru-hike the JMT. There was a 12-year old girl who thru-hiked the PCT with her family a few years ago. You don't necessarily have to wait until they are grown and gone.

Married but no kids, and your wife (or husband) is not a hiker? Make sure your spouse is involved in your hike, and in agreement with it. Some spouses provide trail support whenever possible. Others meet up along the trail at points, so that they can spend time together. Don't let the PCT destroy your family or marriage; it's not that important.

Have a great hike!

Comments, Suggestions or Questions?

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