

North Palisade
Sierra Nevada range of California

(14,249 feet)

August, 2016

Big City Mountaineers fundraiser trip that was arranged by ourselves, which only means we dealt with the guides directly and paid their fees so BCM could get all the money we raised.

The characters:

- Yvonne, a quiet-sweet-outside-tough-inside 60ish woman who inspired me to never stop getting out there and trying things way outside your comfort zone.
- Caleb, a young super fit 30-something cyclist that is a walking wiki page for anything you want.
- Our super human guides: Tristan – the funny talker and Trevor the quiet sweet artist.

Day 1

Caffeinated and well fed on breakfast burritos, we met everyone for gear check. I scaled down what I could, packed the community gear and noticed my pack is overflowing and bulging with Pepperidge Farm cookies and bagels - not mine – community food that I assured the guides would be powder cookies after a day hiking with them crushed inside my pack. I was strongly encouraged to protect the cookies – apparently broken cookies don't taste the same – who know guides would be so picky. No one cared about the smashed bagels.

We left the trailhead about 10am and made our way up 2 passes, Bishop Pass (11,900 ft.) and Thunderbolt Pass (12,400 ft.), of which we camped at the bottom. It was NOT an easy hike in (understatement!). Although only 10 miles in, the last section (after Bishop Pass) was cross-county and went up and down a few times. The up was often boulder climbing with a not-light-don't-crush-the-cookies pack on. I was dying at Bishop Pass, my back and hips were aching, my legs were fine (so far). Then it got harder as we went cross-country and the talus was insane. This would have been a tough hike without a backpack but with it felt like murder. I was seriously questioning why I came and I was mad at the world – although I was the only one to blame – just my poor training and me. It took us 9.5 hours when the guides estimated 8. We were that slow (Yvonne and I anyway)! I arrived camp hurting and had a migraine.

Day 2

Today was supposed to be the shortest day at about 12 hours. Tristan came to wake me and I told him I didn't have it in me. I took a rest day, something I never do. An hour after they left, Yvonne & Trevor returned, Yvonne wasn't feeling it. It was a very chill, sort of boring day. I wasn't prepared for downtime, I didn't even bring ear buds, but I found a corner away from camp to listen to some homework, meditation and my book. Wrote some notes for my wedding vows. I'm glad I took the day, but I couldn't do another one. I'd been too manic for the past several months to be this chill for this long.

Day 3

Woke at 5am after a wild night of dreams. We left camp by 6am for a "very long day" (so longer than 12 hrs for sure) up North Palisades. It was a trek and up difficult talus. Yvonne fell and hurt her nose but kept going – bloody shirt and all. Eventually it was just Tristan, Caleb and I. Lots of rock climbing in

exposed areas, which fortunately, due to previous mountain exposure, didn't bother me. But it sure did bother Caleb, this is the first real mountain he's EVER climbed! It was pretty crazy stuff and he did awesome! For me the super nerve-racking part was coming down on the talus (small stuff in steep areas) and slipping and sliding all over the place. This climb had all the stuff in one. We made it back in 12 hours, just behind Yvonne and Trevor (who turned back but took their time getting back, Yvonne is pretty beat up, poor girl). Good tough day but not up for doing it again tomorrow. Migraine crept in for the third day (every evening – luckily not all day).

Day 4

We decided to move camp over another pass, Knapsack (11,800 ft) and camp in Dusy Basin by several lakes. We wanted to make hiking out “easier” (longer but on a trail) and change scenery, besides we were all itching to hike at least a little bit but not do another peak. It was supposed to take us 2 hrs but it took 3.5 hrs. I know I was slow over the talus rocks with a pack and so was Yvonne. I just really didn't want to fall and the pack was not easy. The lake we camped by was gorgeous, it was another amazing view for sure! We jumped in the frigid water to wash away the 4-day smell. All in all, a relaxing day. I went to bed concerned how the next day would take and how my back and hips would hold up. I didn't sleep much at all, Gumbo for dinner didn't agree with me, darn processed food!

Day 5

We broke camp and hit the trail by 6:45 am, we weren't sure how slow we would be and wanted not to get out too late (long drives ahead). We made great time to Bishop Pass, and it was a gorgeous morning - so freaking gorgeous that I started to think this wasn't so bad and actually enjoy myself (in between being reminded I had a pack on). I made lots of little stops to ease the pain in the back/hips, which helped tremendously and was happily back to the car by 12:30 pm (12 miles). It was nice to have it behind me and I must admit to being a little sad we were no longer going to be in the mountains. Since the entire hike back was on a trail, I had some mental room to think about things besides not falling with a pack.

I thought about what I liked and didn't like about this trip, how backpacking fits in to the wilderness experience and what I would be up for in the future. I also thought a lot about my relationship with Matt, our upcoming wedding and this past tough year and how to move forward. I didn't come to any conclusions. I do know I want to get out more in the mountains, that I hate carrying a pack and I need to train harder - this was a ridiculously tough trip that didn't need to be quite so tough. I also tried not to beat myself up about the training or to be mad about all the distractions that hinder training. I don't think I would have been able to train much harder than I did this year - it had just been that insane. I did the best I could, I need to accept that... and have more compassion towards myself. There is a lesson in here that I need to tease out and let settle in deeper.

We all piled into cars and drove back to Bishop for a celebratory/ good-bye lunch at the brewery. Then Yvonne and I were off for our 5-hour drive back to Los Angeles.