



Gazette

Fall 2019

President's Final Letter

Wow, this is the last one of these I'm going to write! It seems almost like yesterday that I was getting everything ready to go hike the Tahoe Rim Trail before the Gathering in 2013. It's been six years since then with lots of changes in my own life and the life of ALDHA-West.

Six years ago, we were a small organization with waning membership, and only one event each year - the Gathering. Since then, we have flourished as an organization. We decided to refocus our efforts on helping educate new long-distance hikers by hosting numerous Rucks. We worked hard to continue our mission of providing fellowship and education among long-distance hikers and those who support them. We built a community of caring members who have been amazing in helping make all this happen. Now, as my time as president comes to an end, I am happy to say we have a growing membership, we are financially stable, we established events to help educate new hikers, and we have a great Board to help continue the mission of ALDHA-West.



OR Ruck - 2019

All these great changes during the past six years would not have been possible without the help, support, and hard work of our awesome Board members, which I have had the pleasure of serving with over the years. From the first Board to the most recent, everyone I worked with brought a passion to help others, and a desire to engage and facilitate the change our organization needed. A big help for this was adding in additional Board positions, separating out the Treasurer and Secretary as individual roles, and adding a much-needed Vice President who could help keep everything on track and fill in for me when I left for a hike myself. A very big thanks goes to Elizabeth “Snorkel” Thomas, who during her four years as VP, worked tirelessly beside me to help create a vision and an implementation plan to make it happen. She also stepped up in 2016 and ran the organization for six months so that I could hike the CDT.



Current ALDHA-West Board of Directors

One other individual who has done so much in their time is our outgoing Secretary Kate “Drop-N-Roll” Hoch. “DnR” helped us improve our website and gave us a much-needed update in software systems to streamline the back end of our operations to keep everything flowing smoothly. A big thanks to all the Board members I served with over the past six years, and to those still on the Board for another year. I know you will all continue to grow our organization to its fullest potential.

As I depart into retirement, I challenge each of you as members, to step up and volunteer with ALDHA-West over the coming year. Volunteer to help with a Ruck so that our events stay robust and meaningful. When you volunteer you are personally helping and giving back to the trail community that I know you all value. You will be inspiring a new generation of hikers each season. Mostly though, volunteer so that you may have fun and enjoy the company of fellow

hikers as you all work together for the long-term well-being of ALDHA-West and the long-distance hiking world.



2018 ALDHA-West Gathering

I hope to see all of you this September at the Gathering so that we can catch up, swap stories, and enjoy a weekend of fellowship and inspiration. Thank you again for the opportunity to serve these past years.

Happy Trails,
Whitney "Allgood" La Ruffa

Sponsor Spotlight

This issue of the Gazette's "Sponsor Spotlight" features Kevin Webber, Owner and Co-Founder of Fourpoints®, one of ALDHA-West's sponsoring companies. We asked Kevin a few questions about Fourpoints® so that we can get to know them better. If you have any additional questions for Kevin, please leave a comment.

Please give a brief description of your company. What products do you sell? How did you decide which products to specialize in? How long have you been doing this?

Fourpoints® is a Colorado-based nutrition company specializing in low glycemic, slow-burning, real food products designed for function, performance, and a healthy blood sugar response. Our flagship product, Fourpoints® bar balances proteins, fats, and low to moderate glycemic carbohydrates to support hours of sustained energy while avoiding sugar-spikes and crashes that derail performance and healthy blood sugar. The only plum and fig-based bar on the market combines with whey protein isolate, hemp seed, and assorted nuts and superfoods to create a truly unique taste with unrivaled function. Using no additives and preservatives, our product follows our company mantra of less is more and leave no trace. We promote outdoor recreation and your ability to get the most out of your performance while protecting that public land you play on. We designed our product out of our families fight with diabetes and our love for outdoor recreation. We are in our third year in business though our product was really created for ourselves long before.



Who do you see as your market? How do you reach these folks?

Our target market is..well..us! Outdoor enthusiasts and consumers that expect more from their performance foods. We wanted to create a true energy bar, not for quick energy, but for long sustained energy. We chose to build our brand and product in the very outdoor industry we grew up in, that way we could differentiate ourselves from the crowded bar market in a space where people like us are going to put it to the test. Landing REI gave us legitimacy within this industry, and from there we hope to bridge the gap between the outdoor industry and the natural food industry by communicating the importance of good nutrition and outdoor endeavors.



Did you start as a DIYer? How did you make the leap to starting this business?

Yes, with backgrounds in sports-nutrition, fitness-training, and culinary arts, along with principles learned in our families fight against diabetes, we set out to make a better product for ourselves and to support our goals. With no timeline to make a business out of it, we were afforded the time and opportunity to make improvements along the way before going to market. We sold our first bar in November 2015.

If you were to play “futurist” in your industry, what would you predict? Materials, design, market, etc.

I predict that with an increasingly crowded market and in an age of instant information that the bar will be raised in all industries, especially ours to innovate and offer better solutions to real problems. I see a trend where consumers are becoming more nutritionally savvy and not falling for fad diets and products that fail on their promise. Today’s consumer wants authenticity, transparency, and performance they can count on.

Do you see the possibility (opportunity and/or threat) that the big gear makers try to buy up the cottage gear makers like we see happening in the craft beer space?

I see the possibility as an opportunity for small companies with good brands and products to increase their distribution and broaden their marketing reach.

What is your goal for your company? How big do you want to be? Are there new product lines you would like to be in?

Our goal is to be the Patagonia of energy bars. What I mean by that is that Fourpoints be known for creating top of the line exceptional products and use our platform in the industry to exercise conscious capitalism and social awareness for conservation efforts and public lands protection. It is our obligation to protect the places we play. Our #whereveryouplay campaign is the beginning of that effort. We aim to be the premier energy bar for the industry and grow to become internationally known. We have a host of new product ideas that will focus on innovation and better functioning performance nutrition.



The Fourpoints® team with Senator Michael Bennett – Colorado, at the Outdoor Retailer Snow Show, promoting public lands

What do you think are the greatest market opportunities for your product...expand the US market, Europe, Asia? How do you plan to achieve these opportunities?

We have a huge opportunity with our expansion out of the rocky mountain region and into national markets in REI where we are now in the 31 largest markets. By continuing to highlight our differentiation and really own our place in the outdoor space we will bridge the gap and grow in the natural and conventional space. We have already seen this begin to happen with our launch in Safeway and Natural Grocers this year.

Does your company give back to the trails and wilderness areas? What does your company do to promote trails and sustainable use of them?

Fourpoints® is a proud member of the Continental Divide Trail Coalition, Leave no Trace, and Colorado Outdoor Business Alliance.

Favorite beer? That's tough...Colorado has a lot of great beer; however, Broken Compass Brewing - Coconut Porter & Station 26 - Juicy Banger IPA have to be close to the top for me.

Favorite hike? Chicago Basin in the San Juan mountain range of Colorado



FOURPOINTS®

fourpointsbar.com

How to Create a Healthy Resupply from a Convenience Store

Katie “Salty” Gerber

Let's start with a quick story of an experience I had on the [Oregon Desert Trail](#). We had just walked the remaining 7 miles into McDermitt, NV, arriving around 8am for what would be the closest day we'd have to a zero on this 750-mile route through the sparsely populated region of eastern Oregon.

It'd been 10 days of 90-degree dusty desert hiking since we'd had a shower, and 6 days since we'd had any meals other than backpacking food. I was jonesing for some vegetables. I'd been dreaming of a big bowl of dark leafy greens with tomatoes, beets, walnuts, avocado, olive oil, and balsamic vinegar.

Alas, as much as I'd prayed to the desert gods for some real, healthy food, I knew I wasn't going to find it here. McDermitt is a ranching, farming, and mining town that straddles the NV/OR border. It consists of a motel, a cafe/casino, a PO, a high school, and an all-in-one gas station/market/convenience store. This was one of the few places I didn't mail myself a [resupply box on the ODT](#) and I was immediately regretting it.

For the next stretch of trail, I needed a 5-day resupply. The only place to buy groceries in town was a small gas station/market/c-store. It consisted of 8 rows of packaged foods, a few coolers of soda and beer, and a small stand of “fresh” produce (Hey, at least was produce at all!). Time to get creative.

If you don't like mailing yourself resupply boxes ahead of time or if you are hiking any trails or routes off the beaten path, you are likely to encounter this type of resupply situation. Here's how I approach eating for health and energy when resupplying from a convenience store (or anywhere with limited options).

First, accept that you'll have to make some compromises, but don't give up on the goal of healthy eating entirely! It may all look like junk, so you think, 'oh well' and you settle on the idea of Snickers for days. But, hang on! Upon closer look, some choices are better than others. Use the following simple process to sort the worthy choices from the not-so-great items.



1. Make Your List

Until you get the hang of what items you need for a healthy resupply, and before going into the store, write a short list of ideas for breakfast/lunch/dinner/snacks/beverages. For efficiency and cost, choose items that can be used in multiple ways for different meals (like corn chips you'll eat with PB for lunch and again with beans for dinner OR trail mix that can be added to oatmeal for breakfast or used as a standalone snack). Keep your list general: nut butter, salami, breakfast bars, oatmeal, nut butter, etc. Be sure to have a mixture of flavors and textures as well as macronutrients. Shoot for about 20% protein, 40% fat, and 40% carbohydrate, and adjust in the future based on what feels best for your body.

2. Choose Your Food

Time to enter the store and browse the shelves. When you see an item from your list, you'll likely see multiple different varieties (chips/pb/trail mixes/etc). Which to choose? Look at the ingredient label. **You are looking for the least number of ingredients possible. You are also looking to avoid added industrial oils (canola oil, corn oil, soybean oil, etc), preservatives, food colorings, and high fructose corn syrup when possible.** Unfortunately, it's not always possible in these tiny stores, but do your best.

You are also looking for items in their most whole food/least processed form. Focus on proteins, healthy fats (olive oil, avocados, coconut oil, nuts), and low sugar carbs.

If there is a produce section, look for the freshest (not wilted or bruised), most nutrient-dense items to either pack out or eat before leaving town. Amazingly, many of these tiny places sell avocados (great for potassium, fiber, antioxidants). Bags of spinach or carrots are also widely available and durable enough to pack out.

3. Calculate Your Calories

Before leaving the store, use your phone calculator to quickly get an estimate of the calories. This takes less than 5 minutes and can help you avoid overspending on (and carrying) food you don't need and/or assure you that you have enough if you're feeling uncertain.

For the amount of calories you need each day, that will take a bit of experimentation, but use [this calculator](#) (or something similar) to get in the ballpark, and adjust from there depending on terrain, climate, and whether you're losing a bunch of weight or not. Add up the calories in your basket and divide by the number of days you plan to be out. Voila. If you want to go above and beyond, calculate your macros to be sure you have the right ratio of fat, protein, and carbs. This would likely be easiest by entering the foods into a free app, such as MyFitnessPal.

What I Chose in McDermitt for my 5-Day Resupply

My calorie goal for 5 days early in the trip was about 11,500, or roughly 2,300 per day. Here's what I found in the convenience store. A couple items, where noted, were left over from my last box, but these calories could have been substituted with other bars or trail mix or another avocado from the c-store.



1 lb bag Tortilla Chips=1500 calories

1 lb whole carrots=150 calories

1 large avocado=300 calories

1 apple=100 calories

Dehydrated Refried Beans=300 calories

2 Coconut Oil packets (leftover from my last resupply)=240 calories

3 coconut-greens-collagen smoothie mixes (leftover from last resupply)=600 calories

3 Kates/Fourpoints bars (leftover from last resupply)=900 calories

3 Granola packets (leftover from last resupply)=750 calories

4 tuna pouches=300 calories

1 lb peanut butter=2600 calories

3 bags of fruit/seed/nut trail mix=2300 calories

Chocolate Bar=600 calories

Pepperoni=800 calories

Salami=700 calories

Electrolyte drink mix=50 calories

Kombucha (drank in town)=80 calories

total= ~12,200 calories

I usually pack just a little bit extra, such as a couple bars, for calories in case I'm hungrier than expected or take longer to reach the next town than expected.

As you can see, it's not 'perfect' in terms of being organic, super high-quality food, but it covers my nutritional bases, and it's far from the typical pop-tarts/snickers/Doritos resupply that could be purchased from the same store.

If you're curious how this compares to a 5-day healthy lightweight meal plan I would ship from home in a resupply box, [read more here](#).

Remember, even when options are limited, you can still make good choices that will fuel you for optimal energy and endurance!

THRU-HIKING ALLOWED ME TO OVERCOME ONE OF THE MOST DIFFICULT LIFE OR DEATH EXPERIENCES OF MY LIFE.

Miguel "VirGo" Aguilar

Long-distance hiking is a journey of unknown and exhilarating moments coupled with debilitating and excruciating pain. Once I understood a few of the strategies for preparing for, and for coping with the challenges on the trail I understood how these lessons apply to any difficult situation. For me, thru-hiking is the opportunity to focus on one goal and to confront social, physical, emotional and spiritual challenges along the way. On every hike I anticipate that I will make mistakes along the way, and with each mistake comes a better understanding of myself and of my own capabilities. There are certain strategies and techniques within thru hiking that I have transposed onto daily life outside of trail life. These strategies and techniques helped me get through one of the most difficult times of my life.

DAY ZERO: I LEARNED TO PREPARE AND NOT PLAN

There you are, the night before embarking on your journey. You may have done countless hours of research. You may have watched videos of others who have done the journey before you. You've purchased gear. You've downloaded apps that will serve you ease and guide you through your adventure. You may have talked with others who have experienced your future journey, you've read blogs, and maybe even enrolled in a class to teach you some techniques to become better skilled. You've saved money, paired down your life to prepare for your journey. You feel you are prepared and confident in beginning Day 1 of your journey.

This is how I felt before the beginning of my 2,600 mile thru-hike of the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT) in 2012, my 2,900 mile thru-hike of The Continental Divide Trail (CDT) in 2013, the 750 mile thru-hike of The Oregon Desert Trail (ODT) in the Fall of 2017, as well as on December 26, 2017 with the imminent birth of my first-born.

Thru-hiking taught me to prepare and not plan. P-L-A-N is a four-letter word on trail. PLAN is a misnomer in the long-distance hiking world. So, when it came to Day 1, not of a thru-hike, but of being a father, I was confident and prepared. I prepared for the journey of childbirth just as I had prepared in a similar way for my thru-hikes, I did countless hours of research, watched

videos, purchased gear, downloaded apps, talked with others who have children, read blogs, and even paid for an online class I was able to download and listen to while hiking the Oregon Desert Trail three months before the due date. I saved money and paired down my life to accommodate the future journey of fatherhood, but all my spadework did not prepare me for what would happen next.

STEP 1: TAKE STEP 1

My partner, Jamie wanted to give birth at a birthing center to make it a less clinical vibe than at a hospital. While at home on December 23, 2017 she went into labor. The next two days we watched movies, went on walks, and gathered our bags to bring to the birthing center. We transferred over to the birthing center on Christmas morning where we prepared to have a Christmas baby! We opted to let the sex of the baby be a surprise at the moment of birth. Little did we know we would receive more than one surprise. After three and a half days of labor, the final minutes before birth had come. At 5:55 am the baby's head crowned and Jamie felt the baby jerk strangely. I could see the baby's scalp with all its hair as it made small jerking movements like it was nodding its little head. Our midwife's tone changed when she said with urgency that the baby's scalp was darkening. Things sped up. At 6:01 am I saw our baby's face for the first time as it released what looked like a dark black milkshake from its nose and mouth. I distinctly remember thinking, "that's really odd to be seeing this, but I guess this is what birth is like for the baby." As dark liquids dispelled from the baby's nose and mouth, our midwife pulled the baby out and began to vigorously stimulate it. We all waited to hear a cry, but none came. I looked down and saw a freshly born baby, our baby, gasping for air. I didn't know if this was normal, or not. I had seen a few babies in birth videos that needed to be stimulated to breathe. Then I heard, "Call 911", and my heart sank, my body froze, and my head went into a place I hadn't experienced since 2013 right before my CDT hike when a tree fell on my head while I was sleeping and knocked me unconscious. Hearing, "call 911" rendered me shell-shocked. Everything slowed down and my vision became choppy like the effect in the opening scene on Omaha Beach in Saving Private Ryan when Tom Hank's character gets his bell rung by an explosion. My hearing was muted, and time seemed to stand still. The midwife immediately began CPR over its tiny mouth and nose. Still no crying. Between yearning for crying and watching our midwife implementing breath after breath, I caught a glimpse of Jamie who was slapping the bottom of the baby's feet trying to help stimulate it. We were all saying, "come on baby, come on baby." I began rubbing its stomach and felt how warm it was. I'll always remember how warm the baby was. I wanted to hold our baby, but I couldn't. I wanted Jamie to have her golden hour, where the baby lays skin-to-skin directly on the mother's chest and nurses for the first time, but that wasn't going to happen. Jamie asked, "Is it a boy or a girl?" and we discovered, in the midst of the chaos, the surprise we had been waiting for that now seemed like the least important piece of information, "It's a boy!" I remember that moment because that's when our baby boy was officially named as Jamie looked me in the eyes and began saying, "Come on Oscar, you can do it!" After what seemed like an eternity, but was only six minutes later, the ambulance arrived. During that six minutes Oscar struggled for life while our midwife performed CPR. The EMTs arrived and began to intubate Oscar, a process of inserting a tube through his mouth and into his airway. The tube is then connected to a manual ventilator that pushes air into his lungs ultimately keeping him alive because he was unable to breathe without support. They accidentally pushed the tube in his stomach the first and second try and then reached his lungs on the third. We then had to transport him to the nearest

Children's Emergency Hospital while someone manually pressed on a tiny fireplace-like bellows between their thumb and index finger providing puffs of air through the tube into Oscar's lungs. Since Jamie had to recover from the birth, I was to ride with Oscar in the ambulance. We slowly carried Oscar on a stretcher down 2 flights of stairs, out into a frozen, 29-degree, dark patio that was glazed with ice. This is when the lessons of thru-hiking began kicking in. I learned on trail that when you're with another hiker and you are uncomfortable with something; a river crossing, a snow- field crossing, anything, you have to speak up and communicate your fears, your thoughts, your voice. I was holding the stretcher at the spot right beside Oscar and before crossing the 30 feet of icy patio I stopped all the EMT's and said, "Hey, remember, there's a lot of ice from here to the ambulance. I don't want to drop him, and I just want to make sure we take our time getting across this and get him safely into the ambulance." We took careful steps while an EMT continuously squeezed on that bellows at a rate of over 100 beats a minute, ensuring Oscar was receiving oxygen into his lungs. We successfully got Oscar into the ambulance, drove to the emergency room, and I ultimately ended up in the waiting room where I would wait to hear whether or not our son would live.

YOU HAVE NO CONTROL ON A THRU-HIKE OR IN A WAITING ROOM.

There I was, alone in the waiting room, just like in the movies. It felt surreal. I had so many emotions and physical feelings surging through my body, I couldn't figure out what I needed. I was overwhelmed and I felt a sense of panic overcome me. I remember the feeling I had during thru hikes when I had no control of time, of miles, of weather, of plans. None of it was really in my control. Thru-hiking taught me that I had no control of the future, but I could concentrate on the present, on the state I was in, and focus my efforts on things I did have control over. By focusing on things that are in my control I could find a way to alleviate the feeling of panic. I learned to check in with myself while thru-hiking. Am I hungry? Am I thirsty? Do I want to stop and take a break? Continue on or camp here? Which route feels best to travel? I used this strategy to my advantage in that surreal moment in the waiting room. I found that I needed to eat, I needed to drink water, and I needed to quickly accept that I had no control over the situation. This eased my mind and I went in search of the cafeteria where I would be confronted with another opportunity to put into practice what I had learned from the trail.

ENTITLEMENT

In a sleep deprived daze, I headed to the cafeteria where I would be challenged in a different way. While in the cafeteria, I was in a fog. I fumbled through the multitude of choices of food and drink; from hot to cold, savory to sweet, I struggled to identify what I needed to eat. There was a man in his early sixties trying to get something, and I was accidentally in his way. His impatience ramped up and I could sense his irritability directed toward me. I continued to be indecisive and misstep around the cafeteria and wherever he wanted to be, I always seemed to be in his way. The tension was palpable as I went to pay for my food. I walked up to the cashier and guess who followed directly behind me? Again, I was able to annoy the man by taking a while to get my payment through for my food. His glare was piercing and my impatience with him quickly ramped up. I thought, "Does he even know what my morning has been like? Does he even know that today was simultaneously the best and worst day ever in my life?" His impatient sighs and body language made me want to turn around and lay into him fiercely. At that moment, my small reflection of "does he even know what my morning has been like"

connected me to a lesson of the trail. When I would enter town after walking for 100 plus miles, I sometimes felt weary, bedraggled, and ready for the services town had to offer that would make me feel better. I sometimes wanted it faster than it could be offered and ran into obstacles such as a no vacancy sign at the motel or the hamburger joint being closed the day I arrived. I would start to feel entitled to these luxuries because I had been without for days or weeks having trudged through 13,000-foot mountain passes, forded across swollen icy-cold creeks, slept miserably in a wind whipped tent, the miseries were endless. Thru-hiking taught me not to have this sense of entitlement because no one forced me to do it, I chose to. Thru-hiking taught me that if that entitlement reared its head in town, it only served to stain the reputation of hikers visiting the communities along the route of the trails. Entitlement had no place in the hospital cafeteria that morning either. Entitlement serves no purpose other than to irritate, inflame, incense, and create barriers between people. After all, I had no idea what that man's morning was like. Could he have just lost his loved one? Perhaps he was just as frazzled and in shock as I was, and our paths crossed for this short time. Well, we were to really test our patience when I paid for everything and wandered off to find the creamer for the coffee. There was only one area to fill your coffee with sugar and cream, and I got there before he did. When he rolled up to see me where he wanted to be, he let out an exhausted, "oh my God!" This is where I could have really lost my shit, but thankfully thru-hiking taught me that like the storms overhead, so too this moment would pass. I kept my head down and sweetened my coffee as fast as I could to get away from the situation.

After the cafeteria challenge, I headed back to the waiting room to face my ultimate challenge. Our main midwife had arrived, and she and I remained in the waiting room until the doctor walked out from behind the doors. He called my name and both the midwife, and I stood to receive the news. In a matter-of-fact tone the doctor said, "He's stable, but not out of the woods yet." Oscar had suffered Meconium Aspiration Syndrome and Hypoxic Ischemic Encephalopathy. Meconium Aspiration Syndrome is defined as, "respiratory distress in a newborn who has breathed [aspirated] a dark green, sterile fecal material called meconium [poop] into the lungs before or around the time of birth." Most babies survive, but some do not if it is classified as severe. Oscar's meconium aspiration was severe. Hypoxic Ischemic Encephalopathy is the result of lack of oxygen to the brain at birth and is treated with therapeutic hypothermia. In layman's terms, Oscar was unexpectedly in distress in an otherwise low-risk, natural birth and was deprived of oxygen for an unknown amount of time prior to and just after birth. Nobody has explained to us why this occurred. There was no way anyone could have prepared for or prevented this emergency, no one is to blame, and everyone did their best under the circumstances. While clean, fresh air is the first thing that's supposed to enter the lungs when a baby is born, a thick, black sticky tar-like substance polluted Oscar's lungs. This created inflammation throughout his entire body including all his major organs with a very indeterminate effect to his brain. The Hypoxic Ischemic Encephalopathy required Oscar to be on a "cooling bed" which was to lower his body core temperature from 98.6 to 94 degrees for a minimum of 72 hours straight. It was explained to me like this: (I'm paraphrasing) "Imagine you hit your thumb with a hammer. It swells. You add ice to keep the swelling down. Oscar's entire body, inside and out, was just hit with a hammer and inflammation is running rampant. We need to stop that swelling everywhere, especially the brain to avoid brain damage." So... in a nutshell, Oscar's entire body was suffering from severe inflammation, his lungs were polluted, he was to be put on a thin cushion over a metal sheet,

with just a diaper on, to maintain his body temperature at 94 degrees, and he was on the maximum amount of respirator support providing his lungs oxygen as his body had to naturally remove the meconium over time. He was given a 50/50 chance and it was clear that what was to happen was completely out of our control.

PUT YOUR HEAD DOWN AND MAKE THE MILES

There comes a time in every thru-hike of mine when I ask myself a question: Do I want to continue, and do I have the fortitude to continue? I remember reaching Steamboat Springs, Colorado going Northbound on the CDT and I said to myself, "I could call it a hike now and be satisfied." ... I continued on. I remember the EXACT moment I decided to hike the most miles I ever hiked in one day... and then did it. I remember having lunch at the base of Hope Pass, a three mile, three-thousand-foot ascent followed by a three mile, three-thousand-foot descent and taking it one-step-at-a-time. I remember countless days when I was physically drained and chose to put my head down and make miles in order to get to where I wanted to be. These moments are when you reach inside yourself and ask yourself, "Do I have the resolve?" What a lot of thru-hikers don't tell other aspiring thru-hikers is that thru-hiking can be very difficult, stressful on the body, and mentally taxing. The constant daily routine of thru-hiking wears on you and simultaneously shows you your grit. Walking twenty, thirty, sometimes forty miles a day for months at a time taught me resilience. So, when I was faced with uncertainty with Oscar's life, I knew what needed to be done. I needed to put my head down, face the adversity ahead, have a positive mental attitude, and live in the moment knowing that the future was extremely uncertain. Thru-hiking gave me this structure, this ability to overcome each obstacle as it presented itself in order to reach a goal.

Both Jamie and I were allowed to stay with Oscar in the NICU (Neonatal Intensive Care Unit) for as long as Oscar needed it. I developed a daily routine. Just like thru-hiking I had a goal: to leave the hospital with a healthy baby boy. Like thru-hiking I had no idea of what lay ahead and I took each day hour by hour. Since we continually stayed with Oscar in the hospital, we couldn't cook like we normally did at home. In the thru-hiking community we have a mantra, "The trail provides." It surely did when a friend of ours created a meal train which is a crowdsourcing platform that helps organize home-made meals given around a birth, surgery, or illness. Our first obstacle was the 72 hours of Oscar being on therapeutic hypothermia. It wasn't until four and a half hours after birth that we could finally hold Oscar, but not touch his skin because our heat would warm him up. Jamie began a rigorous schedule of pumping milk so when/if Oscar survives, she would be prepared to give him the supply of breast milk he needed. There were endless chores to do from cleaning pumping parts, reading books and singing songs to Oscar, gathering our daily essentials for an unknown extended stay at the NICU, organizing visitors, getting breakfast, lunch, dinner, showering. All of these monotonous and daily necessities, under the security and protocol of the NICU, all while under the constant weight of Oscar possibly not surviving made for a stressful time. It was here when I remembered what it felt like to be deep in the Owyhee Canyon, alone, extremely remote, and invested. I was at a point where going back was the same mileage as going forward. I felt like I was at the bottom of a fishbowl with both sides leading up and I was the only one who was going to get myself out. My family and I were at this point now. We were done with the first steps, through the birth,

out of the initial trauma, into a hospital, on a respirator and cold blanket with a 50/50 chance of survival. We were invested. Except, there's no going back... there's only forward.

YOU LEARN A LOT ABOUT YOURSELF ON THRU-HIKES

The Pacific Crest Trail was my first thru-hike that provided me the basic skills of thru-hiking. I learned a lot of the "How-to's"; How to read a map, how to re-supply, how to bounce a box. These skills required research, attempts, and follow through and when I did these enough times and was successful, I developed a certain feeling of accomplishment. Even when I wasn't successful at them, I learned what I did wrong and tried not to make the same mistake again. After the PCT, I felt the next logical step was the Continental Divide Trail. This was the thru-hike when I put into practice all I learned on the PCT. While the PCT gave me basic thru-hiking skills, the CDT gave me advanced thru-hiking skills such as map and compass navigational skills, water-management skills, and energy management skills while simultaneously allowing me to hone my basic thru-hiking skills. It also gave me the ability to push myself further mentally through learning how to curb anxiety, fear, and worry. Lastly, my thru-hike of the Oregon Desert Trail gave me the confidence of making good decisions. To me, having an advanced knowledge of thru-hiking doesn't mean I know what to do in every situation that presents itself. The ODT threw many obstacles I had on both the PCT and CDT and presented new ones that I had to discern. But, the biggest joy the ODT gave me was the ability to really be one with the terrain since a majority of the trail is not on a trail but cross-country overland routes. Daily, I had opportunities to make good decisions about where to traverse across the land to expel the least amount of energy like an animal would. I was feral. I was able to feel this because I was confident in my skills as they allowed me to move swiftly, freely, and with self-assuredness. Preparation meeting opportunity allowed me to have successful thru-hikes. These thru-hikes prepared me to face one of the most difficult experiences in my life. I am very grateful for them, as I am grateful for Jamie and Oscar who made it through his ordeal. It took him 22 days in the NICU to heal before he was discharged. He's a very happy, healthy, and adorable 20-month-old now and recently a big brother to his 2-month-old brother, Otto. Thanks for reading my story.

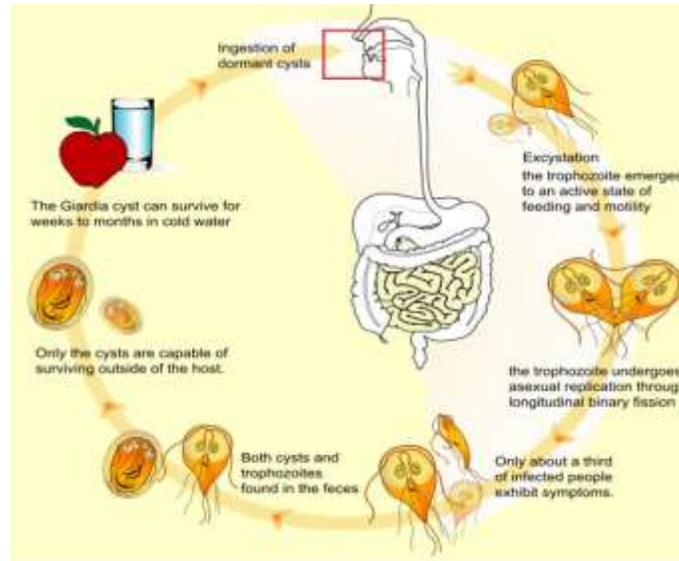
Your alcohol-based sanitizer does nothing to kill Giardia!

Craig "Skygzi" Gulley

Does this shock you? I know it did me when I first heard this. Doesn't everyone have hand sanitizer in their poop bag? As you are about to dive into a friend's trail mix bag, don't you hear, "did you sanitize your hands" (what you should be hearing is STOP, but we will discuss that another time!)¹ After filtering water from a particularly stagnate beaver pond or cow pie water trough, isn't the first thing you do after collecting water, sanitize your hands?

In fact, alcohol-based hand sanitizers, the way they are used, have virtually no effect on giardia. So, what does, and what is the best way to protect yourself from giardia in the backcountry? In order to understand how to best prevent Giardiasis while hiking lets first look at what makes giardia so tough.

Giardia outside the body is a tough “bug.” Outside the body it creates a Cyst. Literally a hard “cocoon” that allows it to survive for weeks to months outside a host. **



Rights free internet drawing

Once ingested by a host the trophozoite emerges and starts to feed and multiply. The only plus side is that only about one third of those infected actually get sick.⁷

Now that we know what it is and how it works, how do we stop it? The best defense is a good hygiene offense. Since most hikers don't eat many (not enough) fresh foods in the backcountry. The food tends to be packaged or repackaged in some manner so contamination this way is small. The biggest culprit for transmitting germs is our hands³, but this is where our alcohol-based hand sanitizer should solve this problem, right?

Alcohol sanitizers work by actually killing the germs they come into contact with. The alcohol breaks down cell walls and destroys the organisms it comes in contact with. This includes any healthy bacteria that is commonly found on your skin. This however is not a problem for a normally healthy adult as you will readily make more. It will also dry out the skin as it evaporates moisture from the surface and can lead to chafing and cracking if used frequently. These types of sanitizers were designed for developing countries, without clean water sources, (which could be most backcountry hiking settings) and have been in use in hospital settings for years and have been found to be very effective against most germs. However, alcohol sanitizers are ineffective if your hands are soiled, meaning debris like blood, grease, chemical solvents and especially dirt. How ironic then, that in order to “clean” your hands, your hands have to be clean. Alcohol sanitizers will evaporate if not contained but it is this evaporation that helps break down and carry away dead germs. In order to be effective however alcohol-based hand sanitizers must be wet on the skin for between 30 seconds and 5 minutes²! (how many of us do that?).

It used to be commonly believed that Girardi could be killed by alcohol-based methods if it was 80% or stronger with either Isopropyl or Ethanol alcohol. The problem here is none of your consumer-based hand sanitizers come at this strength.⁶ * They range from 47% to about 70% and the same brand can vary widely, which may account for the wide range of pricing as the same brand can have different concentrations of alcohol.

Spoiler alert- There is a study that shows that alcohol-based hand sanitizers do kill Giardia by breaking down the cyst with as little as 63% alcohol and found no difference between the 63% concentration and the 80% concentration with the caveat that it had to be left on the hands for 5 minutes! ⁵ Something I am sure none of are doing.

Good old soap and water.

Surprise! Soap and water don't actually kill germs. The combination of the soap as a lubricant to loosen and lift debris and germs, including Giardia cysts, from your skin and the water to wash it all way is the most effective way to prevent disease. Plain old soap and water are actually more effective than antibacterial soaps, as the concentration of the antibacterial agent is not enough to kill bacteria but used to linger on the skin to help prolong "clean hands." It is these antibacterial agents that have gotten the reputation as being the cause for breeding "super germs" resistant to normal antibiotics.⁸

Plain soap and water made into a good lather and used for the time it takes to sing Happy Birthday to yourself eliminates 90% of all bacteria and viruses from your hands. Want to eliminate 99%? Sing Happy Birthday to yourself twice and it doesn't matter if the water is hot or cold, although really hot water can blister and scold your hands and actually hinders the amount of time you want to wash them, so stick with lukewarm to cold water. Don't forget to dry your hands as well. The whole hand washing scenario should take about a minute to insure truly clean hands.

Summary:

The most effective way to keep your hands clean and therefore keep clear of the biggest cause of getting sick on the trail, is to wash our hands with soap and water for about 40 seconds and then thoroughly dry them. If you are in a situation where water is scarce an alcohol-based hand sanitizer of 63% alcohol will kill many germs but will not be effective against Giardia unless left on the hands for 5 minutes. So, think about replacing or at least augmenting your hand sanitizer with a dropper bottle of regular soap!

Citations and Notes:

^{1,3} STOP- the single biggest cause of hikers getting sick is sharing food with others. You may love your friends but assume they are carriers of disease. If you are going to share your trail mix or any food, have them hold out their hands and pour them some or hand them some, don't allow anyone to stick their hands in your food bag or touch your food.

^{2,5} <https://blog.gotopac.com/2017/05/15/why-is-70-isopropyl-alcohol-ipa-a-better-disinfectant-than-99-isopropanol-and-what-is-ipa-used-for/>

⁶ Antimicrob Agents Chemother. 2015 Nov; 59(11): 6749–6754. Published online 2015 Oct 13

⁶ What Organisms Does Isopropyl Alcohol Kill? by Tucker Cummings

* Author comment What about Bleach? Bleach does penetrate the Giardia cyst and kill the trophozoites, but unlike alcohol-based sanitizers, where the alcohol evaporates and is not absorbed through the skin, bleach is absorbed through the skin and can cause other health risks, so it is not recommended for human consumption.

⁷ Authors note- As I write this, I know that I am always that 1 in 3 that gets sick

⁸ Harvard EDU newsletter January 2007

** author comment If you think it would be nice to cool off in a still pond along the trail, think twice, especially one with signs of animal use like beavers and cattle. Any open sores or cuts, including blisters on your feet and especially an accidental mouth full of water is an invitation to Giardiasis