

Hikertrash:

Life on the Pacific Crest Trail



For Mami and Bearclaw, With Much Love

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First Edition published 2014.

ISBN-10: 0692341382

ISBN-13: 978-0-692-34138-4

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This epic adventure was made possible by many wonderful people, who I would like to thank from the bottom of my heart. A huge shout out to Sean, Lauren, and Meghan, for being the best support team ever; we couldn't have done this without you. To Wendy and Ron, for cat-sitting our furry baby. To Dr. Bo, for the medical advice. To the family and friends that cheered us on every step of the way. To our trail family, who kept us motivated, even when we didn't think we had another step in us. To the incredible trail angels we met along the way, who helped us out when we needed it the most and restored our faith in humanity. To the complete strangers, who left trail magic and caches in all the right places. To Halfmile, for making the incredible maps that guided us along the way. And to the Pacific Crest Trail Association, for their continued efforts in the maintenance and protection of the trail I so dearly love.

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ASIA: AN IDEA IS BORN

“What do you think we should do when we get back to the States?” I asked Carl as we sat across from each other at a tiny table, sipping steamy cups of fresh local coffee in the morning sun.

We were sitting outdoors at a street side café in the Chinatown District of the UNESCO World Heritage port city of Malacca, Malaysia. It was early enough that the narrow streets, lined with antiquated French and Dutch colonial shops and homes, were mostly empty; it was the calm before the storm of tourists that would have the streets bursting at the seams within the next hour or two. I liked Malacca: every day was sunny and warm, the people were easygoing, the food was off-the-hook good, and above all, we were footloose and fancy-free, my favorite way to be. I should’ve been preoccupied with where we were headed once our ferry docked in Indonesia the following morning—we’d already bought two tickets to Sumatra and we hadn’t even looked at a map—but I was fully confident Indonesia would sort itself out when we got there. As I stared down the ancient street, nearly deserted in the early morning hours, my mind was on bigger problems.

After two years in depressing, cloudy, ultra-conservative North Idaho, we’d reached our breaking point and, teetering awkwardly on the brink of insanity, we’d sold our house, bought a pop-up camper, and headed off on a cross-country budget journey in search of a new place to call home. Well, technically that’s what we were supposed to be doing, but as we’d slowly made our way from Alaska to Northern Mexico and back again, we’d spent more time exploring the backcountry of the National Parks than we did looking for a place to call “home.”

We’d backpacked through The Narrows in Zion National Park, across Yosemite and the Ansel Adams Wilderness, and into the heart of the Grand Canyon. We’d gingerly sidestepped geysers in Yellowstone, deprived ourselves of oxygen in Rocky Mountain National Park, followed the Chilkoot Trail in Alaska, basked in the beauty of the Trinity Alps of Northern California, and even made it to Great Basin National Park, the least visited and most remote national park in the contiguous United States.

We'd hiked and camped until snow covered the mountain trails and we'd finally had to admit the season had ended.

Not surprisingly, by the time winter had rolled around, we still had no idea where we wanted to be. I thought about petitioning Yosemite National Park to let us live, wild and free, in the mountains, but I'm fairly certain they would've said no. Instead, we did what any rational couple would do; we pushed the decision-making off until May and bought the cheapest tickets we could find to exotic, sunny Bangkok. Not only did it buy us a few months' time before we had to make a decision, but it also meant we wouldn't have to move across the country in the snow and cold.

We'd already been in Southeast Asia for four months, and we hadn't even thought about home, let alone figured out what we were going to do when we got back. Instead we'd been preoccupied with more important things like exploring ancient temples à la Indiana Jones, jumping off thundering waterfalls into deep aqua green pools, diving into Technicolored coral reefs, playing chicken on scooters in crazy thick traffic, and doing a bang-up job of overall ignoring reality. Ignorance was definitely bliss, but as the days slowly ticked down I found "reality" seeping into my thoughts and harshing my perpetual state of travel ecstasy. We would be flying home in two months—and we didn't even know where home was.

As I gazed down the quiet streets of Malacca, I was suddenly all too aware that May was fast approaching and we needed to stop procrastinating and make some sort of a plan.

I peeled my eyes away from the elderly man vigorously sweeping the street in front of his little shop and stared back at Carl, waiting for his response. I figured he would have some idea of what he thought we should do when we got back, but I never expected the answer I got.

"I've been thinking about it," he responded slowly, "and I think we should thru-hike the PCT."

What? My husband was full of surprises!

"It's something I've always dreamed of doing" he hurried on, "and right now we have no obligations or responsibilities, so really, the timing's perfect. We already have a lot of the gear we need and we'd be camping every night, so it shouldn't cost much. April and May are when most people start, so we'll be getting back at just the right time. What do you think?"

"You don't need to convince me," I smiled, "You had me at, "We should thru-hike the PCT.'" Challenge accepted. Life rule number one, never, ever, turn down an adventure.

My knowledge of the PCT, or Pacific Crest Trail, at that point was that it was a 2,660 mile backpacking trail which started somewhere along the Mexico/USA border near San Diego, California and stretched all the way to somewhere in Canada. I knew it went through a handful of National Parks, including Yosemite, because last summer when we'd hiked through

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Yosemite to Thousand Island Lake in the Ansel Adams Wilderness, we had seen the PCT trail signs. As we sat along the lakeshore eating dinner, Carl had told me, “One day, I want to hike the PCT.” In fact, for as long as I’ve known him, he’s talked about one day hiking “The Trail”. That day had apparently come.

As we sat there watching Malacca come to life, a wide smile spread across Carl’s face.

INDONESIA

“Maybe we should divide the planning so we can tackle this more effic—”

We were on the ferry to Sumatra, discussing how we should tackle planning for the trail when they began playing the in-ferry movie and I found myself momentarily dumbfounded. The movie of the day just happened to be *The Impossible* about the 2004 tsunami.

Northern Sumatra was devastated by that tsunami. In the city of Banda Aceh alone it was estimated over 150,000 people lost their lives that day. I was speechless. Was this a tribute? A warning to tourists? Or was this their version of an inflight “what to do in case of an emergency” video? All discussion of the PCT stopped as Carl and I watched in horror and morbid fascination as Henry, played by Ewan McGregor, ran around a ravished Thailand trying to locate his family amidst the chaos.

The only thing I can think of that would be more unnerving than being on a tiny ferry, in a big ocean, watching a movie about a tsunami that had been spawned almost directly below your very feet would be watching a movie about 9/11 on a flight to New York City.

The fun didn’t stop there. We were drug searched by border patrol upon arrival, chased through the rainy streets of Dumai by a screaming tuk-tuk driver who refused to believe foreigners knew how to walk, and bounced over every pothole in Sumatra on a sixteen-hour bus adventure into the heart of the island before we finally found ourselves in the serene Batak village of Tuk-Tuk, on the island of Samosir in the middle of the stunningly picturesque Lake Toba.

Travel weary, we decided Tuk-Tuk would be our base for the following two weeks so we could begin seriously planning for the trail. Most thru-hikers take six to eight months to plan for the PCT; we had a little over two months and we were doing it while backpacking. In *Asia*.

Carl and I were going to have to be ridiculously efficient if we were going to pull this off.

We made a list of everything that would need to be accomplished and split the list in half, which allowed us to focus on specific tasks and

prevented us from wasting the precious little time we had trying to accomplish the same thing.

It was decided Carl would be in charge of gear and tech, securing a decent set of trail maps, finding flights, applying for permits, and for making trailhead arrangements. I would be responsible for the hiking schedule, organizing and prepping food and sundries, and planning our resupply strategy.

“We’re going to need a new tent. Ours is too heavy,” Carl said matter-of-factly.

We were curled up under the covered patio of our little five dollar a night guesthouse, watching the rain pour down across the lake and planning fervently. For a week we had spent our mornings exploring and our afternoons hunched over our laptop and notepads planning.

“What the hell?! Our tent only weighs five pounds! We don’t need to waste money on a new tent!” I am notoriously thrifty.

“Exactly, it weighs five pounds. That’s *way* too heavy to take on the trail. I’ve been reading up on it and...”

Carl’s one of those people who researches, reads reviews, and makes plans and purchases based on the information he’s gathered, which is why he’s in charge of tech and gear. He’s exceptional at that kind of thing. If I were in charge of tech and gear, I’d have just made a mental note of everything we needed to pull out of storage when we got home and hoped for the best. I had a feeling the tent was only the tip of the iceberg, but I had no time to argue because I was too busy trying to figure out our schedule so I could begin purchasing food.

The longest backpacking trip we’d ever taken was fifty-five miles in five days. We’d thought we were rock stars. The longest we’d ever hiked in a day was about twenty-one miles, but that was without a backpack. Some might describe our desire to hike all 2,660 miles of the Pacific Crest Trail as a little ambitious (read: stupid) but I never for one minute doubted our ability. After all, it was just walking, right? All we had to do was stick one foot in front of the other for “x” amount of miles over “x” amount of days.

Solving for “x” was the problem; I hate math. How many miles could we sustain each day? What would our average speed be with full backpacks? How much slower would we be while gaining elevation? How many days off would we need? When? Where? How many days off could we afford to take? I agonized over this every afternoon for two weeks—and I probably would have agonized over it longer, but two weeks was all I had.

In the end, I decided to start us out at sixteen to eighteen miles a day for the first 800 miles as we crossed the desert and climbed over the Sierras. Even if we hiked at a snail’s pace for ten hours a day, we’d have to be able to get *at least* that far.

Through Northern California, I bumped us up to twenty miles a day. By mile one thousand, we should be in good enough shape to manage those distances. The average for Oregon would be twenty-two miles, because I'd read that the Oregon section of the PCT was relatively flat. And finally, back down to twenty miles in Washington to account for the steep, mountainous terrain.

I pored over blogs of successful thru-hikers, and my numbers seemed reasonable. Hell, some of those guys were hiking thirty mile days.

When it was all said and done, I'd planned 133 days of hiking, with an average distance of twenty miles a day and a total of twenty-four "zero" or "nearo" days. According to the blogs I'd read, a "zero" was a day with no-hiking and a "nearo" (a near zero) was a low-mile day. I figured I'd better start talking like a hiker if I was going to be one.

As I watched a spectacular sepia-toned sunset reflect off an ever-peaceful Lake Toba during our last evening in Sumatra, I couldn't help but wonder, "How am I going to plan 157 days' worth of meals from Asia?"

I should have chosen tech and gear because Carl was pretty much done with his list. And by that I mean that by the time we'd left Indonesia, he'd ordered completely new, ultra-light gear.¹

"until one is committed, there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back, always ineffectiveness. Concerning all acts of initiative (and creation), there is one elementary truth, the ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans: that the moment one definitely commits oneself, then Providence moves too. All sorts of things occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred. A whole stream of events issues from the decision, raising in one's favour all manner of unforeseen incidents and meetings and material assistance, which no man could have dreamt would have come his way. I learned a deep respect for one of Goethe's couplets: Whatever you can do or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic in it!" - W.H. Murray (The Scottish Himalayan Expedition)

BANGKOK

March 6th found us back on Soi Rambuttri, a winding, foot-traffic only street, stuffed beyond capacity with budget hotels, street-side bars, massage parlors, spicy Thai street food, and backpackers from literally every corner of the globe, where we waited for my brother Nat to fly in from Canada for his thirtieth birthday.

Slightly more cultured and quiet than backpacker party central, Khao San, and far less depraved and seedy than Soi Cowboy in the Red Light

¹ For our complete gear list, see Appendix One.

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District, Soi Rambuttri had become our go-to Bangkok layover spot. This “layover” was four days, enough time to grab Nat, give him a whirlwind tour of the city, apply for visas to Viet Nam, get plane tickets, and get the hell out. I adored Bangkok, but four days was serious sensory overload.

As Nat and I sat at a computer in the lobby of a nearby hotel working on visas and tickets to Ho Chi Min City, Carl sat opposite applying for our PCT long distance permits and printing off the applications for permission to enter Canada via the trail.

We’d read it would take a minimum of six weeks to receive our long distance permits, so we were cutting it close. Since they were being shipped to Carl’s sister with the rest of our gear and supplies, we wouldn’t even know if we had permits until we arrived back stateside.

The Canadian entry permits would need to be sent back with Nat and mailed in from there; it was doubtful we’d see them in time for our departure but technically we wouldn’t need them until fall, so there was time.

I should’ve been stressed but it’s hard to be stressed in Asia, especially on Soi Rambuttri, where everyone’s on vacation and cheap beer flows like water.

VIET NAM

Nat had three wishes for his thirtieth; the first was to visit Viet Nam, the second was to quit smoking, and the third was to get his scuba diving certification.

A quick flight from Bangkok to Ho Chi Min City was followed by a sleepless night crammed on tiny bunks in the scorching hot sleeper compartment of a grimy, cockroach-infested train. To improve our spirits, we downed whiskey and Red Bull courtesy of our Ukrainian bunkmates. Fourteen hours later, we finally arrived in the seaside city of Nha Trang, Viet Nam. Wish one granted.

Wish two magically morphed into a New Year’s Resolution when Nat discovered how cheap and plentiful cigarettes were in Viet Nam. His justification was based on the fact he’d be thirty for the rest of the year. A technicality, but that was his defense. I image the beautiful, giggly Vietnamese “Cigarette Girls” lining the streets didn’t help either.

While Nat was at dive school, accomplishing wish number three, I spent my days planning five months’ worth of backpacker meals. In my head, I’d imagined the schedule to be the difficult part and the meal planning to be the easy part.

I mean, all I had to do was go online and order 157 freeze-dried backpacker dinners in a variety of flavors, followed by 157 freeze-dried backpacker breakfasts. For lunch and snacks, I’d order about three hundred

packages of ramen, a bazillion trail bars, and some trail mix, and I'd be done. Or so I thought...

"\$4,600 dollars?!" I spat out, trying not to choke to death on my Oreo cookie.

"What's \$4,600 dollars?" Carl asked, confused.

"\$4,600 dollars is what it would cost to buy 157 freeze-dried breakfasts and 157 freeze-dried dinners and that doesn't even include lunches and snacks. That's *outrageous!*"

With freeze-dried backpacker meals completely out of our budget, it looked like I'd be making our meals myself.

Advice I found on the internet:

- *Never pack more than ten of the same meal, or you'll be so sick of it you won't even want to eat it.*
- *Powdered peanut butter and powdered eggs are not as gross as they sound.*
- *Buy bulk dehydrated foods and make your own freeze-dried dinners.*
- *Pack 2,500 calories or more, per person, per day.*

We'd made it our goal to do a little PCT planning every day and still have fun with Nat and explore Asia. Wedging meal planning around scuba diving, hot springs, trips to the beach, scooter adventures, waterparks, and other shenanigans, I managed to muddle through breakfast, lunch, and dinner, praying my calculations were correct and my homemade recipes would, at the very least, be edible.²

For breakfast we'd be eating oatmeal three times a week, dehydrated eggs twice a week, and granola or cereal two times a week. For each of these I'd invented four to six completely different recipes so we wouldn't get bored or have to eat the same meal more than ten times. Oatmeal with banana chips, chocolate, and coconut was a completely different meal than oatmeal with freeze-dried apple, brown sugar, and cinnamon, *right?*

Lunch would be a mixed bag of ramen noodles, powdered hummus, powdered refried beans, powdered peanut butter with powdered honey, and that weird cheese and sodium nitrate sausage that doesn't require refrigeration yet somehow never seems to go bad. Besides the soup, all of these items would be tossed in tortillas, pitas, or whatever carbohydrate rich, bread-like substance we could find on the trail.

I broke dinner into the following food groups: rice, pasta, dehydrated mashed potatoes, and hearty soups. The soups and some of the pastas we'd buy pre-made. For the potatoes and rice meals, I simply created a few

² Some of the recipes we used have been added in Appendix Two.

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unique recipes, carefully adding random variations of dried veggies, spices, meat, and faux-meat to make each recipe different.

All the nutrients and calories missing from our main meals would be made up for in our snacks, which basically consisted of trail bars, trail mix, candy, dried fruit, candy, chocolate, Pop Tarts, and more candy. My nine-year-old self would've been proud.

Two weeks and eight hundred dollars later, the entire stash of dehydrated and freeze-dried food—including fifty pounds of oats, twenty-four pounds of granola, and 330 trail bars—were being shipped to Carl's sister. I was left with a carefully organized list of groceries we'd need to purchase upon our return and a dozen pages of recipes carefully scrawled in the back of a notebook. I guarded that book with my life.

While I was busy with all of that, Carl was hard at work ordering maps, rethinking and ordering more gear, and finally buying one-way tickets from Spokane, Washington to San Diego, California for May 9th.

It's funny how you can spend countless hours planning something, buy hundreds of dollars' worth of food and gear for it, apply for permits to actually do it, and discuss it to death with friends and family and yet it never quite seems real until you've purchased the tickets. We were actually going to do this!

It was strange to think we'd be flying to San Diego only to turn around and walk all the way back to Canada.

HUA HIN

"It's raining?!" I said excitedly to Carl, feeling warm drops of rain hit my head and shoulders. I looked up in time to discover that just because warm drops of liquid are falling from the sky doesn't necessarily mean it is raining. Sometimes, it just means a monkey, sitting on a telephone wire, has decided to pee on you.

We were two miles into our daily ten-mile training hike in muggy, hot Hua Hin, Thailand, and now I was covered in monkey pee. For the rest of the day, this had Carl and me in hysterics.

"Oh, what did you do today?"

"Nothing much; just got peed on by a monkey. You?"

After Nat had returned to Canada, Carl and I still had a month before our flight home. We'd tried to change our tickets to return early so we could start the trail sooner, but the airline wanted more money to change them than we'd originally purchased the tickets for in the first place. Instead, we decided to pick one place in Thailand where we could rent a cheap studio apartment for a month and start training and finalizing details for our thru-hike.

For twenty-six days, we woke up early and hiked up the only hill in town, trying to get back home before we died of dehydration in the intense tropical heat. We'd tried hiking with our backpacks, but the constant chaffing became unbearable. If nothing else, we were conditioning ourselves for the month or so we'd spend hiking through the desert.

During the heat of the day, we hid indoors, planning, scheming, and thinking of important things we'd completely forgotten.

"Oh, I thought of another one! Where are we going to stay for the week when we get back?"

"We could camp."

"How are we going to prep 157 days' worth of food while camping?" In all honesty, it had kind of slipped my mind we didn't have a house anymore.

"Maybe we could stay with Diane and Thom?"

"No. We aren't even going to ask." Carl's sister Diane and her husband Thom are organic farmers; their summers are busy enough with farming, workshops, apprentices, farmer's markets, vegetable deliveries, and animals. The last thing they needed was us underfoot.

"Do you think Sean and Lauren would take us?"

Sean, Lauren, and their daughter, Meghan, some dear friends from Sandpoint, had already offered to be our support team and store and mail our resupply boxes for us, which was huge. I felt bad even thinking of asking them if we could also stay with them for a week, at which time we would, in all likelihood, turn their house upside down with our trail preparations. Unable to think of an alternative, we asked and without hesitation they happily agreed to take us in.

Days quickly turned into weeks and, before we knew it, we were back on Soi Rambuttri, getting ready for one last train ride to the airport.

HOMeward BOUND

Our flight home arrived in Spokane, Washington on May 1st at 5:55 p.m. We would be leaving Spokane for San Diego on May 9th at 12:30 p.m. If my calculations were right, that would give us seven days, eighteen hours and thirty-five minutes to finish buying supplies, portion and vacuum-pack five months of food, plan, fill, label and prepay for our twenty-eight resupply boxes, discuss resupply strategy and timing with our support team, unpack and repack our backpacks, load our MP3 players with music and books, sift through six months of unopened mail, say hello and goodbye to family and friends, and get our asses back to the airport and onto the plane!

I predicted a week of organized chaos mixed with complete and utter mayhem. I used our twenty-eight hour flight to agonize over a schedule that would allow us to cram everything in and followed it up with a silent prayer that somehow the flight gods would spare us from jet lag.

When Nat had flown back to Canada, he'd warned us the return jet lag was an ass-kicker. He had been out of it and almost completely useless for seventy-two hours. I didn't have seventy-two hours to be useless, and I probably wouldn't have again until next fall.

"Ladies and gentlemen, we'll be arriving in Spokane shortly. The local time is 5:46 p.m., and the temperature on the ground is 54° Fahrenheit."

Thirty sleepless hours, four airports, three flights, and one reroute later, I felt more like passing out face first in the baggage claim line than anything, but we desperately needed to hit the ground running.

Our backpacks had barely hit the hotel room floor and we were off to R.E.I. Outfitters to start ticking off things we still needed from our gear list.

Let the countdown begin...

EIGHT

One night, about a month before, I had tried confirming our resupply locations from Thailand but between having to stay up until an ungodly hour to get the time change right, a crawling internet connection, and a barely audible phone, it only took two calls for me to realize I was wasting my time.

"You could probably not worry about it. Five hundred people have already called and confirmed them this year anyway," Carl had been quick to point out.

While this was true, I sure would feel stupid arriving at a post office in the middle of nowhere only to find out I'd shipped our food to the wrong address or the hours I thought the post office was open were wrong. The problem with cheating off someone else's test is that if they get the answer wrong, so do you.

With that thought in mind, I reluctantly crawled out of the fluffy, warm hotel room bed and began calling all twenty-eight of our resupply points between Mexico and Canada, changing hours and wrong zip codes as I went.

By midmorning, Carl's sister had dropped us off at our own vehicle, which had been hastily stored in a barn outside of Coeur d'Alene before we left for Asia. Thankfully, it was still there and it started. With no time to waste, we drove into town to tackle our ridiculous grocery list. Bouncing from Costco to Walmart to Safeway, we tossed food in the cart like the end of the world was nigh.

"We're not crazy," I reassured the checkout woman as she scanned forty-four boxes of family-sized mac n' cheese, twenty-two pounds of trail mix, a hundred and sixty trail bars, twenty-four pounds of dried fruit, a few hundred packages of ramen noodles, and an unhealthy quantity of candy.

"This is North Idaho; I just figured you lived out of town or *something*."

“We aren’t survivalists, militia, or wackos either.” I added with an innocent smile, remembering where we were.

Seven exhausting hours later, we landed on Sean and Lauren’s doorstep. When they offered to help us with our luggage, they didn’t seem at all fazed that we’d arrived with a five-month supply of food and a mile-high stack of cardboard boxes and packing supplies. If anything, they seemed prepared and excited to take on the role of our support team.

SEVEN

If five years of Christmas and birthday presents merged, you still wouldn’t have the pile of mystery boxes and envelopes that were waiting for us at my in-laws’ house.

We didn’t even get out of the driveway with our precious cargo before I was reaching into the backseat and tearing into whatever box I managed to grab. Shiny new trekking poles, the two-pound tarp tent that had started it all, rain jackets, backpacks, mini MP3 players, water bladders, mosquito head nets, air mattresses, and other essential gear quickly piled up at my feet.

Picking up six months of unopened mail, we were elated to discover both our long distance permits and our Canadian entry permits had arrived.

By the time we finished unboxing, sorting, organizing, and double-checking all of our new gear and dealt with the six months of ignored “reality” that had shown up in the mail, it was late.

Adding thirty-two cans of dehydrated ingredients to the enormous stack of food that already nearly consumed Lauren’s dining room, I sighed. Dreading morning, I went to bed.

SIX

All I remember between breakfast and bed is destroying Lauren’s kitchen as we mad prepped and vacuum-packed all of our breakfasts. If it hadn’t been for Lauren, Sean, and Meghan literally dropping everything to help, I would have never, in a million years, pulled it off.

Lauren, Meghan, and I portioned ingredients according to the recipes I’d invented in Viet Nam and then passed the bags off to Sean, who vacuum-packed, labelled, and stacked each one.

While I turned Sean and Lauren’s house upside down, Carl was out collecting the last of the gear, troubleshooting random issues and otherwise running around like a madman trying to get everything that needed to be accomplished completed before we ran out of time.

Ten hours later, I sat at the table staring in satisfaction at 157 vacuum-packed breakfasts while Lauren and I continued to portion out twenty-two

weeks' worth of coffee, trail mix, dried fruit, candy, dried milk, powdered peanut butter, humus, and more candy.

By midnight, I couldn't even remember my own name, let alone how I'd come to be sitting in the middle of such a random heap of food.

FIVE

The fifth day before our departure happened to be Cinco de Mayo, and as Lauren, Sean, and I geared up for another whirlwind meal-making extravaganza, I couldn't help but wonder if they were fondly remembering last Cinco de Mayo, when we still had our own house to destroy and simply came over for dinner like normal friends.

Enlisting Carl and Meghan's help, the five of us managed to prep all of our dinners and clean up the kitchen just as guests started to arrive for Sean and Lauren's annual fiesta.

FOUR

I never factored into my schedule how long it would actually take to sort and box five months of food into twenty-eight resupply boxes. Somehow, I had thought that by noon I'd be smugly staring down twenty-eight taped and labelled boxes, stacked neatly in the garage.

Instead, at noon, I was sitting in the middle of twenty-eight heaping piles of food that started at the foot of the couch and, spanning the entire length of the living room, ran all the way into the kitchen.

"Okay, this box is for four days out, so we need four breakfasts, four dinners, and four lunches... No, that's wrong because we'll eat breakfast in town that morning. Crap. We only need three breakfasts and five lunches, not four," I would tell Carl uncertainly.

He would then toss me food to add to the pile.

When it was all said and done, we had a half a dozen leftover dinners, a dozen leftover breakfasts and a few random snacks.

"Are there supposed to be leftovers?" Carl asked, concerned. There were, but not that many. We might be going hungry on occasion. Oops.

Too tired to deal with it, I chucked the leftovers in random piles and began the arduous task of cramming each pile into the one-size-fits-all cardboard boxes we had bought.

By dinner, the boxes still weren't labelled or stacked neatly in the garage and I had fallen miserably behind schedule. Only three more days!

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THREE

By the time the sun came up, Carl and I were already halfway to Spokane. It was a rush trip to pick up Carl's new hiking shoes that we had ordered upon our arrival. We also needed to retrieve the recently found UV umbrellas we'd bought in Thailand, which the airline had lost somewhere between here and there. If we found time, we still needed to find hiking clothes too.

Carl and I had been debating clothes and shoes on and off since Indonesia. Carl carefully selected the Merrell Moab Ventilator hiking shoe, based on a myriad of reviews and thru-hiker recommendations. I would be wearing the Vibram Five Fingers I lived in last summer and taking the minimalist New Balance shoes I recently acquired as a backup. I could tell Carl was less than impressed with my lackadaisical approach to these things but in all likelihood, I was going to burn through at least four or five pairs of shoes on this trip, so if I didn't like the ones I was starting out with, it wasn't like I was going to have to put up with them for long.

For clothes, we aimed for minimalism, each taking two shirts, a pair of running shorts, a pair of zip-off pants, two sets of underwear, two pair of socks, a base layer, an ultra-light down jacket and a rain shell. In addition we'd each have a thin pair of running gloves, a knit cap and a mosquito net. Carl needed to find UV shirts; I needed to stop at Walmart for some cheap running shorts and sleeveless shirts.

By early afternoon, we were back at Lauren and Sean's, adding odds and ends to our resupply boxes.

"Should we put a roll of toilet paper in every box, or every other?" I asked my friend Tammy, who had stopped by to help out and say goodbye.

"Seriously?! You're not going to want to run out of toilet paper out there. Stick one in every box." Good point. When I finished, I was one roll short. Hopefully when we picked up the box without toilet paper, we'd be somewhere with a store!

Carl grabbed the first three boxes and raced to the post office to express ship them to our first three resupply points. We'd be at our first town in five days; hopefully our resupply would make it in time.

By the end of the day, I was exactly where I'd wanted to be yesterday at noon, smugly staring down twenty-five resupply boxes neatly stacked in the garage. Each box clearly was marked with "Please hold for PCT thru-hiker!" and random stickman hiker doodles.

TWO

To buy back some of the time I'd lost on the resupply boxes, I was up before five o'clock. Trying not to wake anyone, I started the day by typing

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up a *Resupply Shipping Schedule* for Lauren and Sean, who would ship out our boxes two weeks before we needed them. Hopefully that would be enough time for them to arrive at our resupply points, but not long enough for them to be deemed “undeliverable” and returned.

By the time everyone was awake, Carl and I were in the backyard, testing some of our new gear before stowing it away in our packs. We’d hoped we would be able to thoroughly test all of our gear before heading out, but there just wasn’t enough time. Gear testing would have to wait until we were on the trail. If we were missing pieces, we’d be finding out the hard way!

With less than twenty-four hours to go, we scrambled to tie up loose ends, load music and audio books onto our MP3 players, wash laundry, and study the maps for California Section A, the first leg of our journey.

With everything but our backpacks back in storage, you’d think we’d have been ready to roll, but I could still think of a dozen little details that needed to be taken care of...

ONE

I woke up in full-on panic mode. Our flight was leaving at 12:30 p.m., we were an hour and a half drive from the airport, and there was still so much to do!

Out on the deck, using rubber cement to glue trash compactor bags together to create ultra-light rain skirts from a pattern we’d found online, I couldn’t help but shake my head and laugh. Oh my God, I was actually gluing trash bags together with rubber cement! Not only that, but I planned on wearing them. Had I lost my bloody mind?!

While the skirts dried, I moved on to the online application for a California fire permit and printed off the water reports for Sections A & B. While I ran to grab the printouts, Carl checked us in for our flight and reconfirmed our ride to the trailhead in the morning.

By the time we packed up, we were already a half hour late. Applying years of L.A. commuting skills, Lauren got us to the airport with minutes to spare.

As the plane took off for San Diego, it finally sunk in. We were actually going to thru-hike the Pacific Crest Trail!