

Hiking the Triple Crown by Karen Berger (2001)

The Triple Crown is the Appalachian (2167 mi), Pacific Crest (2650 mi) & the Continental Divide (3100 mi) Trails. Most hikers start at the south end in April & average 13 miles a day on the AT, 18 on the PCT & 22 on the CDT to finish before winter sets in. Horses are allowed on some trails. Most hikers figure \$1 per mile + \$100 per food drops (this can double). Treats in town are a morale booster (a sense of deprivation can wear on you). Somewhere along the trail a trail name finds you.

Some hikers get tired of the dehydrated meals so they make their own by using mashed potatoes, stove-top stuffing, instant rice, quick-cooking pasta or noodles, gravy mixes, cheese, freeze-dried beans, dry milk, quick-oats, instant soups & trail mix. Figure 2 pounds of light-weight food per day. Try the food at home before the hike. Boil thin pastas with lid on for 1-minute, turn off stove & let set for 5-minutes. Raisins, peanuts & banana chips help replenish electrolytes (sugar, salt & potassium). Take vitamins & listen to cravings. Take some comfort foods.

Never use UPS for a drop box to a post office & make sure USPS delivers to remote areas. If staying at a hotel in town, use UPS to there instead of rushing to the post office before they close. Replace bug spray, socks, etc as needed. Send an extra map of the next section in case a drop box gets lost. Make a schedule of when to mail which drop boxes. Setup a website to share photos & stories of the trip with family & friends.

Hiking poles really help reduce stress on the knees & helps stabilize at stream crossings. Wear nylon socks under smart wool socks. **Do not let hot spots turn into blisters** (immediately stop & look or use moleskin). Petroleum jelly fights chafing, but hydrocortisone treats it after. Don't use snake-bite kits; just slowly walk out for help. After brushing against poison oak wash clothes in water & use Ivy-out on skin. Washing clothes in Permethrin to repel ticks; if bitten get checked for Lyme disease.

Buy durable, light gear from mfr & stores with good return policies (keep phone #s with you). Keep pack weight light if wearing running shoes. A pair of boots might last 1000-1500 miles, but shoes only 700 (have 2nd pair broken-in & shipped in). Take two pairs of clothes (wear one & a spare dry set) & extra layers as needed. Wash socks at night & let dry. Get a comfortable pack that transfers weight to hips. Six days of food & 1-gal of water weighs 20 lbs added to your base weight (< 20# is ideal).

Most prefer down sleeping bags except in wet weather; Lightweight boots (sneakers in some spots); canned-fuel stoves; tents (tarps in some cases); rain jacket or poncho; trekking poles. Use an ice ax & instep crampons in snow areas; light gloves. The bigger & stronger hiking partner should carry more weight. Wear bright colors in hunting season.

Cross large streams & snow fields in the morning (less run-off & harder snow). Cross stream in water shoes, facing upstream, use poles, undo pack straps, & use water-tight bags (sleeping bag, clothes & camera). Make sure surroundings match the map. Do not sleep with your food! Make noise when you see a bear.

The Appalachian Trail (long-green tunnel) is the most social; has the most access points & is the easiest. Earl Shaffer was the first documented thru-hiker in 1948. 2700 hikers start out each year, but only 400 of them finish (start out with only 10-miles a day). It is a slower trail due to distractions & has actual boulders to climb over in PN. It has more than 250 shelters on the trail & towns nearby. The trail doesn't use switchbacks as much as it should. The Smokey mtns & New England fall colors are a highlight.

The Pacific Crest Trail is challenging, but a good trail. The desert start is rough (take 2-gal of water, Gatorade & rest mid-day). Get to Kennedy Meadows by 6/15 to clear most snow (slow travel & hard to see trail). Call 1-888-PCTRAIL (888-728-7245) to check or report trail conditions. Climbing Mt. Whitney is a must. The trail gets easier & faster after Sonora Pass. Miles stones: 1000 @ Kennedy Canyon, 1300 @ Belden, 1700 @ CA/OR border & 2100 @ OR/WA border. Highlights are: Mt. Whitney, Yosemite, Lake Tahoe, Crater Lake, Eagle Creek, & Mt. Rainier. Some go light & fast in OR. Try to finish by Sep 1st or hit the rain in WA. Bring extra clothes for WA (wet & cold).

The Continental Divide Trail is not finished, takes good navigation skills & is extremely difficult, but still have to travel fast to complete before winter. It has the least access points & many parts are windy. Do not camp in dry gullies subject to flash floods. Due to grazing & mining, all water must be filtered. Water shortages & private lands cause many detours. Reach NM/CO border by 6/15 for best passage. Use snow shoes in the mtns. Buy a Colorado hiking certificate (air-evac insur) for \$1. Highlights are: CO Trail, OR Trail, Grand Tetons, Yellowstone NP, Glacier NP. The trail averages 6500' in NM, 11,000' in CO, 10,000' in WY & 6000' in MT. Try to finish by Sep 1st or be ready for winter storms. Bring extra clothes & food.

Books: As Far As the Eye Can See (David Brill); Walking with Spring (Earl Shaffer); PCT (Karen Berger); PCT (Ben Go); PCT (Ray Jardine)

Websites: www.GORP.com www.appalachiantrail.org www.pcta.org www.cdtrail.org