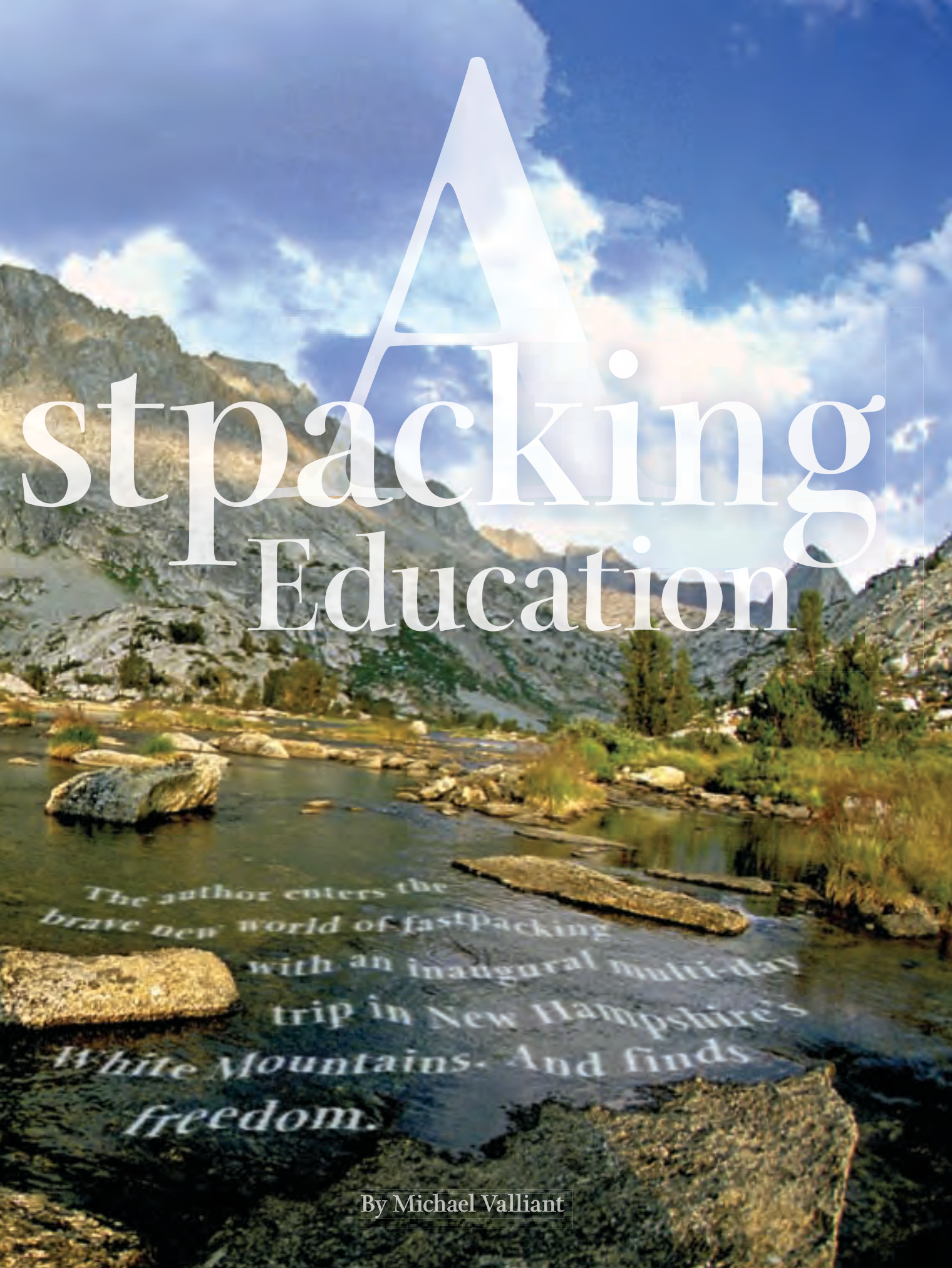




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A Fastpacking Education

*The author enters the
brave new world of fastpacking
with an inaugural multi-day
trip in New Hampshire's
White Mountains. And finds
freedom.*

By Michael Valliant



Although I live in the East, my first experiences on the Appalachian Trail didn't come until recently, ridge running along Crawford Path in New Hampshire's White Mountains. Mount Washington loomed behind us, while lesser peaks formed green swells rolling away from us. Clouds were dangerously close, and fast, neighbors. Nearing treeline, I noted the rough beauty of the bent, wind-tortured trees. But the trek's aesthetic perks were riding shotgun to adrenaline and enthusiasm, as we raced and changed leads over rock piles on our way to Mizpah Spring Hut, which meant dinner and sleep.

I've been running for 20 years, with the last few focused on trail running. But, in 2007, my running partner and I upped the ante exponentially. It started with our

first ultra—David Horton's Holiday Lake 50K++ in Virginia. Then came thoughts of the Gore-Tex Transalpine stage race in Europe, which violently shook the "go for a run" paradigm. The prospect of that multi-day race got us thinking about combining running trails and spending the night out.

My friend and training partner Mike Keene, 43, of Wittman, Maryland, is a White Mountains fanatic, and pointed out that the Appalachian Mountain Club runs a system of huts, where they feed you, provide shelter, a bunk and water.

"We won't have to carry a tent or a sleeping bag, just water, food, rain gear and a few clothes," the arm twisting began. "You'll love it. We'll go light and fast, push ourselves fastpacking in the mountains."

We mapped out a route that would take three days, looking for runnable sections

of trail, the ability to stay at huts and the panoramic vistas for which the Whites are known. Our trek would start at Pinkham Notch, go up and over Mount Washington (6288 feet), the Northeast's highest peak, cruise along ridges and through wilderness areas and on and off the Appalachian Trail (AT). The goal was to cover ground and see things we couldn't on a one-day run.

WHO STARTED IT?

The term "fastpacking" was born during a trip by Jim Knight, 54, of Orem, Utah, and Bryce Thatcher, 45, of Rexburg, Idaho, who in 1988 made a south-to-north traverse of the Wind River Range in Wyoming, chewing up 100 miles, self-supported, in 38 hours.

"Jim [Knight] had this dream of linking the whole Wind River Range, but



PREVIOUS SPREAD: Going deep. Fastpacking allows you to delve into wild places, combining the speed of trail running and the ability to sleep where you please.

FAR LEFT: Ah, all the comforts of home. With today's light and efficient gear, you can be surprisingly comfortable with surprisingly little on your back.

LEFT: Before you go into the wilderness, learn how to use a map and compass, which will give you a feeling of confidence and self sufficiency.

Photos (all): Patitucciphoto

signed on to head-up product design and development for Nathan Sports, where his fast-and-light philosophy is reflected in Nathan's new packs.

His running excursions have continued, though now he focuses on treks that would take most people a few days and doing them within a single day. Thatcher still holds the record for fastest ascent-descent of the Grand Teton—3 hours 6 minutes for the 18-mile round trip that climbs and descends 7000 vertical feet.

The term fastpacking is a bit nebulous, but most people agree that it involves covering ground quickly on trails using lightweight gear and spending the night out, whether that be on the move, on the ground or in a hut.

"The point in fastpacking is to stay on the move as much as possible," says Ryan Jordan, founder of the website and print magazine *Backpacking Light*. "It demands that you have a camp and an overnight component to your trip, but walking or running is your primary mode of action, unlike backpacking where more time is spent in camp. You may have two to four days and you say, 'Let's burn as much mileage as we can.'"

In Jordan's case, a fastpacking trip might include covering 40 to 50 miles per day, with three days being his personal favorite trip duration.

Since Thatcher and Knight's trip, the fastpacking concept has been refined and taken to wilder extremes. As a recent example, in 2004 Kevin Sawchuk,

41, of Alamo, California, set the speed record (which has since been broken) for California's John Muir Trail (JMT), covering its 222.8 miles in 93 hours 5 minutes. Another is Sawchuk and Andrew Skurka's six-day, six-night circumnavigation of Yellowstone National Park in 2006, covering 180 miles.

"To me fastpacking is being able to travel light in order to be able to cover a lot of miles, but also to be able to enjoy it," says Sawchuk. "When I go fastpacking I go to a lot of places that I couldn't if I was going slower. The emphasis is not so much on speed, but distance and what you are able to see and do. I feel so free when I am traveling light and moving fast."

Skurka, 26, of Seekonk, Massachusetts, and Boulder, Colorado, might be as close to a national ambassador as the sport of fastpacking has. On November 3, 2007, he finished a 6,875-mile trek of the so-called Great Western Loop—which links together five existing long-distance trails, including the Pacific Crest, Pacific Northwest, Continental Divide, Grand Enchantment and Arizona trails, as well as a trail-less segment through the Sonoran and Mojave deserts. Skurka averaged 33 miles per day for 208 days, which is equivalent to 262 marathons or twice the distance from Boston to San Francisco. His effort and creativity landed him the distinction of *National Geographic Adventure* magazine's 2007 Adventurer of the Year. During his trip, the base weight (without water or food) of Skurka's pack was between six

could never take seven days off work to do it so we decided to try it in a weekend," says Thatcher. "We did between 40 and 50 miles that first day, and by the end of the second I got a bit hypothermic, and wound up in the car with the heat on full blast for about three hours before I came around!"

An exploration had begun, both on the trail and in pack design and function. "Over time, we became more sophisticated," says Thatcher, "figuring out formulas for how much further you could go if you cut pack weight by, say, 10 pounds."

At the time of the Winds adventure, Thatcher was designing backpacks and created prototypes for the trip. He went on to found Ultimate Direction, a company specializing in hydration and fastpacking packs. After selling the company, he

and seven pounds, only going above 10 pounds in the High Sierra section.

“On a fastpacking trip, you spend long days, with lightweight packs, doing a lot of miles,” says Skurka. “You aren’t just out there to explore nature. You are out there to explore your own limits.”

GETTING READY

I am a runner, accustomed to pushing from 20 to 30 miles with water bottles, a waist pack or hydration backpack. Until our White Mountains adventure, fastpacking was terra incognita, and I gleaned my gear list from books, such as Jordan’s *Lightweight Backpacking & Camping*, websites and friends’ advice.

My kit consisted of a 100-ounce hydration bladder, trail mix, Balance and Clif Bars, gels, rain gear, a water bottle, extra insulating layers and socks, a headlamp, a small knife and photocopied pages from the *White Mountain Guide*.

The Appalachian Mountain Club makes it easy for would-be fastpackers. Routes are well-marked, with accurate distances, degrees of difficulty and trail descriptions. I am thankful for the gear—shelter, sleeping bag, pad and stove—that the AMC huts allowed me to leave home. I guess you could call what we were doing “fastpacking lite,” since we really weren’t self sufficient or sleeping under the stars.

LOGGING MILES

The desire to explore nature and the self is a common thread between fastpacking, trail running and ultrarunning, an overlap in activities shared by Skurka, Sawchuk and another renowned fastpacker Brian Robinson.

“I like the saying, ‘Ultrarunners are fastpackers who don’t like to camp,’” says Robinson, 46, of Monterey, California. In both cases, you are moving into the night, with fastpackers looking to recharge and continue the next day, while ultrarunners are pushing through the night to finish a course and stay ahead of cutoff times.

Robinson is well-qualified to make such an assessment. In 2001, he became the first person to achieve a calendar-year “Triple Crown”—fastpacking the Appalachian, Pacific Crest and Continental Divide trails during a single year. It took him only 10 months to cover the 7371 miles.

But put down the pack and sleeping bag, and he keeps going. If you check the 2007 results from two of the country’s most grueling trail ultramarathons, the Western States and Hardrock 100-milers, you’ll find Robinson’s name there as a fin-

isher (29th out of 270 at Western and 31st out of 97 at Hardrock).

Sawchuk’s accomplishments also include trail running at all distances, but his true love is fastpacking. He started backpacking when he was five. It wasn’t until medical school in the Midwest, where he couldn’t find good backpacking or the time to enjoy it, that Sawchuk turned to running and ultrarunning to stay in shape. Ninety-eight ultramarathon finishes later—including nine sub-24-hour finishes at Western States 100—he now balances the two disciplines. His fitness from ultrarunning allows him to cover more ground fastpacking.

“The JMT speed record was something I had wanted to do for a long time, but not the kind of trip I generally enjoy,” says Sawchuk. “That trip was all about mileage, about 55 miles per day, and elevation, about 12,000 feet per day, and I just pushed—there wasn’t any time to relax and enjoy the trip.”

In stark contrast to his JMT trip, Sawchuk pits his Yellowstone circumnavigation with Skurka. The two blazed 180 miles in six days.

“Traveling light and fast for a week let us see Yellowstone’s grand river canyons, swim in Yellowstone Lake and a hot swimming hole we ‘discovered,’” says Sawchuk. “We felt bison herds pounding away from

TOP: Bryce Thatcher kicked off the fastpacking movement with his and Jim Knight’s traverse of the Wind River Range, Wyoming, in 1988.

Photo: Thatcher collection

MIDDLE: Taking the road less traveled, Skurka covers big miles and carries a light pack, here on his 6875-mile Great Western Loop, 2007.

Photo: Skurka collection

BOTTOM: Kevin Sawchuk likes to get away. Miles from any road, he explores the Kaweah peaks, Sequoia National Park, Sierra Nevada, California. Photo: Sawchuk collection





TOP: "I like the saying, 'Ultrarunners are fastpackers who don't like to camp,'" says Brian Robinson, pictured here during his calendar-year Triple Crown in 2001. Photo: Buzz Burrell

ABOVE: Our heroes, the author (left) and Mike Keene, near the Lakes of the Clouds Hut, White Mountains, New Hampshire. Photo: Michael Valliant

LEFT: If you're game for multi-day runs amid spectacular peaks and like to eat well and sleep in comfortable huts, consider a European vacation. Here, Amy Rasic packs in miles en route to a hut above the Mer de Glace, Chamonix, France. Photo: Patitucciphot

us, heard the mating bugle of elk and saw eagles hunting from fire burned snags. We finished the trip with the feature everyone goes to Yellowstone to see—Old Faithful. However we had packed 180 miles to get there and found that was only a small wonder of the trip."

NIP AND TUCK

On July 31, 2007, with our hydration bladders topped off, we began our odyssey. Our day's agenda was to first summit Mount Washington via Tuckerman's Ravine (known as "Tucks" to the short-of-breath), descend Crawford Path, grab

lunch at Lakes of the Clouds hut, then continue along Crawford to our evening destination of Mizpah Spring Hut, for a total distance of 10.5 rocky miles.

Leaving Pinkham Notch, we ascended a winding, wooded tunnel, emerging into the sun to cross a footbridge and hear the roar of a nearby falls. We quickly distanced ourselves from a cluster of hikers carrying larger packs. The woods gave way to Hermit Lake Shelters, essentially a cabin with some supplies in a clearing. Past the shelters, the gradual grade shifted to the steep ravine headwall, which felt unrunable for my flatlander legs and 19-pound load

(including water and food). Averaging 1000 feet of elevation gain per mile, Tucks redefined the term "incline" for me.

Bodies of weary but stoked hikers adorned various break-worthy stretches—rare, flat rocks and outcroppings, magnets for heavy packs—of Tucks' higher parts. The *White Mountain Guide* lists the average hiking time for Pinkham to Mount Washington as 4 hours 15 minutes. Climbing up the final summit cone, we scrambled hand-over-head into a parking lot marking the summit in 3:08:55. If "summit" seems an odd term for a grueling climb ending in a parking lot, it is. If

they added a Stuckey's Restaurant, you'd have a rest-stop along I-95, complete with any souvenir you may want to take home. But more strange are the looks from the families exiting their cars for photo ops and gift-shop souvenirs.

THE CROSSOVER

Robinson and Sawchuk are known for their ultrarunning accomplishments, but trail running is also a big part of Skurka's training. In 2005, he ran his first marathon, the Lewis and Clark in Bozeman, Montana, signing up on Tuesday before the Saturday race. Just two months earlier he had finished a groundbreaking 7800-mile hike, the first person to hike the Sea-to-Sea route, which connects the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific. The trek took him 11 months, and he had been running less than 30 miles per week since. He finished in 2:55. Running was not new territory—Skurka was a two-time all-state runner in Seekonk, Massachusetts, with a 4:21 PR for the mile and 9:31 for two miles.

"When I am planning for a long hike, I usually don't have time to train by hiking," says Skurka. "Running, specifically trail running, is a compressed workout—I go for a 90-minute trail run versus an eight- or nine-hour hike."

After finishing the Great Western Loop, Skurka is using 2008 as a year to plan his next long trek, as yet unannounced, for 2009.

For Robinson, upcoming challenges include a return trip to Tennessee for the Barkley Marathons 100-mile race. With 52,900 feet of climbing, it is arguably the most extreme ultra, requiring a combination of running, fastpacking and orienteering skills. Only six out of 600 entrants have completed the full course. In 2007, Robinson completed 80 miles at Barkley, the most for that year.

Sawchuk will attempt to ski the John Muir Trail unsupported this spring, before trying to notch his 10th sub-24 hour Western States finish. Later in the year, he plans to fastpack the Hardrock 100 course to prepare for next year's Hardrock 100 race, if he is lucky enough to get in through the lottery.

TREADING THE TREELINE

Each of the Appalachian Mountain Club's full-service huts are run by a "croo," as they term themselves, of young men and women, who handle cooking, dishes and hiking supplies up and trash down the mountain. Mizpah Hut's croo woke us with song, fed us breakfast and delivered the weather report.



After breakfast was cleared, the dining hall's long benches and tables were ground zero for map and route discussion, gear loading and number exchanging to keep in touch with new friends.

The morning called for clear skies and 60s above tree line, with 80s in the valley—warm for the Whites. We prepared for the trip's longest day: nearly 14 miles of technical running and rock walking. We would spend the morning in the Dry River Wilderness Area, perhaps catching a swim in the falls of the same name, hook up with the Lakes of the Clouds hut again for lunch, then high-step over the rocks and ridges of the Gulfside Trail en route to Madison Spring Hut, where we would crash for the night.

Keene and I left Mizpah at 9 a.m.—much later than advised for the day we had planned—and started our descent into the green goodness of the Dry River Wilderness Area. Singletrack trails snaked through the woods, my favorite terrain. I barely felt my pack and parried trees full stride where the trails bent.

"Moose over there!" I joked, though we kept a watch.

"Must have missed that one, but I dodged two snakes back there." They were really there.

Our pace stayed quick until the nearby Dry River Falls deafened us. Whitewater roared down a 35-foot rock wall, filling up a clear pool. I wouldn't have flinched if



TOP: Light, fast and very long: Andrew Skurka skirts Upper Velma Lake on the Pacific Crest Trail, Desolation Wilderness, California, during his 6875-mile Great Western Loop.
Photo: Andrew Skurka

BOTTOM: Backpackinglight.com founder, Ryan Jordan, and faithful running companion Maia during a 100-mile crossing of the Gallatin Range between Bozeman and West Yellowstone, Montana.
Photo: Jordan collection

Ricardo Montalban of Fantasy Island had walked out to greet us in his white suit. We ditched the packs for a series of quick dunks, imbibing the energy of the falls and the river. Swimming holes are not made any nicer, nor much colder, to a couple tidal boneheads from the Chesapeake Bay.

From there, we bushwhacked a lightly blazed trail. Despite, or because of, its untamed difficulty, the Dry River Trail was a treat to run. We pushed above treeline to about 4500 feet, which contrasted with the lush, green wilderness area. Having covered 6.9 miles and spent more than an hour swimming, looking for lost glasses and route finding on the poorly marked trail, we arrived at Lakes of the Clouds hut in 4 hours 52 minutes. It was slightly comforting to learn that most people traversed the Dry River Trail as a two-day hike. We sat down to soup and brownies and were out the door at roughly 3 p.m., headed up Crawford Path toward Madison Springs Hut.

Despite the urgency of making it to the hut in time for dinner, my legs were slowing down. At the same time, Mike, a much stronger climber, was speeding up.

"You are the only way we are getting fed," I said.

"You sure? Are you OK?"

"I'll make it, but you had better make sure there's still food for me!"

Mike took off. The trail didn't miss a mountain or a tricky, rocky, descent, wrapping around Mount Jefferson, with climbs down rock faces just difficult enough to keep me slow and watching my feet. At one point, I realized I hadn't eaten anything since the Lakes hut, almost three hours ago, so I sat down, wolfed some GORP, then got cranking again.

I finally spotted Madison Hut, an egg in a nest of trees behind Mount Adams and beneath Mount Madison. I hop-stepped down a winding trail, having covered the 6.8 miles in 3 hours 42 minutes (still short of the recommended hiking time of 4 hours 20 minutes).

Mike walked out of the hut. "Whoa! You made it! I saved you a spot."

Inside Madison, a full hut of 52 people sat at benches, slipping words between mouthfuls.

"Welcome to Madison. Soup?" said one of the crew.

"You bet."

"Sweet! Sal..."

"Please!"

Followed by some of the finest chicken casserole I've tasted.

FASTPACKING WARM-UPS

Not ready to camp in the wilderness?

Try one of these multi-day running alternatives // By Stephanie Reighart

Overnight Credit-card Runs

Aspen to Crested Butte via Triangle Pass, Colorado. This stunning high-alpine trail links two historic ski towns. From Aspen, follow East Maroon Pass to Copper Creek, ending at the ghost town of Gothic. Alternately, take Conundrum Creek Trail's gradual ascent through a prismatic meadow of alpine flowers (most plentiful in July) and shady spruce forests. Stop for a muscle-soothing soak in the natural Conundrum hot springs at mile nine, but don't linger too long, and save strength to ascend Triangle Pass's scree slopes and descend Copper Creek to Gothic, eight miles from Crested Butte. Spend the night in Elk Mountain Lodge, built in 1919, or one of eight bed and breakfasts. 24 to 27 miles. www.gunnisoncrestedbutte.com

Brevard to Pisgah Inn, North Carolina. In the Southern Appalachian Mountains, the quaint mountain town of Brevard is situated on Pisgah National Forest's front door. From the Black Mountain trailhead, enjoy stirring waterfall views along the Barnett Branch Trail en route to the Mountain-to-Sea Trail. Run through lush, fern-and-moss-covered undergrowth on your way to the hunting-lodge-inspired Pisgah Inn, nestled in the shadow of nearby 5700-foot Mount Pisgah. Feast on fresh-caught mountain trout and behold views of dense, oak-forested peaks and misty valleys from your balconied bedroom. 16 miles. www.pisgahinn.com



TransRockies

Multi-day Stage Races

Chattanooga Mountains Stage Race, June 20-22, 2008. This no-frills event costs only \$60 (supply your food) but delivers three days' trail running on three formidable Chattanooga peaks. Each day's run starts and ends in Chattanooga and ranges from 18 to 22 miles along oak-shaded singletrack wrapping around the bases of Lookout, Raccoon and Signal mountains. Temperatures are typically in the 80s and humidity is high, so aid stations are every three to five miles. Book your own hotel or campsite in Chattanooga. www.rockcreek.com/stagerace

TransRockies Run, August 25 to 30, 2008.

Grab a partner for this six-day, 125-mile adventure across the spine of the Rocky Mountains, from the saloon-lined main drag of Buena Vista to the European-inspired, cobblestone walkways of Beaver Creek, Colorado. Each stage averages 20 miles and follows a mix of forest roads and single-track to each day's camp (set up while you run) featuring hot showers, catered meals, massage and physiotherapy. Entry fees start at \$1350 per person, but include camp services, a nightly multimedia show recapping the day's stage and piles of sponsor schwag including shoes, clothes, watches and an awards banquet. www.transrockies.com

Mountain RATS Stage Race, July 31-August 3, 2008. Near Steamboat Springs, Colorado, this inaugural four-stage race is a loop (covering 10 to 25 miles daily) through waving aspen groves, rugged canyons and along high alpine ridges. Be prepared for significant elevation changes and fickle mountain weather. Carry your own food and clothing for the entire race while organizers transport only your sleeping bag from camp to camp and set up your tent. The race fee starts at an economical \$500 and is limited to 50 participants. www.geminiadventures.com/mrats.html



Alpine Club of Canada

Self-Guided Hut-to-Hut Trips

10th Mountain Division Huts, Colorado. Nestled among the Rockies' western slopes around Vail and Aspen, this network of 29 huts provides charming backcountry accommodation and access to miles of mountain trails. Trails are usually marked, but carry a map and compass or GPS to help you find your way.

For a stand-out three-day link-up, run from the Sylvan Lake trailhead (south of Eagle) 11 miles to the Harry Gates Hut. The following day, ascend 15 miles along a gradual ridge to Holy Cross Wilderness Area, then wind down Yeoman Park's switchbacks, ending with a final five-mile climb. Spend the night in the two-story Polar Star Inn before day three's 18-mile run back to the trailhead. Carry only your sleeping bag and food, as each hut has a fully equipped kitchen and padded bunks. Advance bookings required. \$28 to \$40 nightly per person. www.huts.org

Alpine Club of Canada Huts, Alberta and British Columbia. Some of these charming shelters, like the historic peeled-log Elizabeth Parker Hut, scattered throughout the Canadian Rocky Mountain National Parks, date back to 1919. Others are insulated sheet-metal sheds on glaciers or modern log structures.

The easily accessible Stanley Mitchell Hut in Yoho National Park or Sydney Vallance Hut in Jasper National Park make great trail-running bases, situated six and 14 miles, respectively, from trailheads. Drop your food, sleeping bag and other supplies at the hut and spend a day or two exploring the area's well-marked trail system. Advance bookings required. \$25 to \$36 nightly per person. www.alpineclubofcanada.ca

Appalachian Mountains Club (AMC) White Mountain Huts, New Hampshire. The White Mountains huts make welcome refuges from the area's notoriously high winds and unpredictable snowfalls any month of the year. Link two huts or even all eight by way of a maze of trails often so steep and weather-beaten that, to prevent erosion, trail crews construct quad-burning staircases with watermelon-shaped rocks. Advance bookings required. \$81 to \$89 nightly per person. www.outdoors.org

KEEP IT SIMPLE, STUPID (KISS)

Light is right for more and faster miles // By Michael Bengé

You can be surprisingly comfortable with surprisingly little. And it's liberating to have everything you need to survive right on your back, and pop up camp wherever you end up. The goal in fastpacking is to

carry a load with which you are able to run the flats and downhills, and power hike the uphill. The lighter your pack, the more fun you'll have—even if you have to leave the espresso maker at home.

Backpack. Look for a pack volume of 1800 to 2500 cubic inches, with a sternum strap and lightly padded waist belt. Avoid traditional multi-day backpacks with heavy frames and waist belts and too many bells and whistles. And remember the old adage that no matter what size pack you bring, you'll end up filling it. Minimal-frame (usually a light, flexible frame sheet or padding, enough to provide some form), adventure-racing-type packs like the Ultimate Direction SpeedDemon and the Gregory Arreba are good, because they are light and usually equipped with hydration bladders and accessible pockets for stashing snacks, offer adequate support and fit the body closely for running. Get a pack less than three pounds.

Stove-cook kit. There's nothing like the roar of a little stove to take the loneliness and chill off the evenings and mornings in the woods. Simplicity rules here and it's tough to beat a superlight cartridge stove, like the MSR Pocket Rocket with either a four- or eight-ounce butane/propane canister, depending on the number in your party and trip duration. In addition, bring a titanium pot (e.g. the Evernew 0.9L Ti Pot), plastic cup and spoon. Split the load between the group. Forget the potholder, insulated mug, multiple pans, etc.

Sleeping bag. For three-season trips, a 25- to 45-degree bag of two-and-a-half pounds or less will suffice. While we all know down is useless when wet, its light weight and compactibility make it the insulation of choice; for example, the Marmot Hydrogen is rated to 30 degrees, weighs a wispy 1 pound 5 ounces and packs to honeydew-melon size. Use the smallest waterproof stuff sack you can get your bag into. Significantly increase the warmth of your bag by sleeping in your clothes, including a light wool or synthetic beanie hat.

For summer trips in warm, fair climates, you may even be able to get by with a simple bivy sack for insulation and shelter.

Sleeping pad. Pine boughs work but you'll sleep much better—and warmer—with a torso-length pad, like the Big Agnes Air Core 48-inch pad (plush but relatively heavy) or the Gossamer Gear NightLight Sleeping Pad (very light). Don't go overboard here—consider cutting down that old Therm-a-Rest Z-Rest or other closed-cell pad; you can even use it as a pack liner.

Shelter. In less-buggy and -rainy environments, a 10-by-12-foot waterproof tarp made of parachute/sail-type material is light (less than two pounds including guylines), roomy enough

for up to three people and effective at shedding moisture, and allows for creative setups where a tent might not work. Plus you can spill your noodles and not fret. Or, with many tents, you can leave the main body at home, and simply stake out the fly (you'll still need the poles, stakes and possibly a "footprint," or floor, which can be purchased separately); this setup is heavier than a tarp.

For solo trips, a bivy sack (under one pound) works, but can feel claustrophobic. If that bothers you, consider a one-person tent like The North Face Solo 12. For a multiple runners, a tent allows complete protection and sharing the load. Although it's cramped for two, the Black Diamond HiLight tips the scales at a feathery 2 pounds 10 ounces. Gossamer Gear's Squall Classic is a hyperlight (pound and a half) two-person tent (requires trekking pole for setup).

Water treatment. Although I've drank from springs without getting sick, it's not worth the risk because eventually I got giardia. Not fun. For economy, simplicity and light weight, you can't top Aqua Mira drops (my fave) or Potable Aqua tablets; the only drawback is that you have to wait at least 20 minutes after treatment before drinking. Another option is the SteriPEN Adventurer, which zaps the bad stuff using UV rays and weighs just four ounces. Hand-pump water purifiers do the trick, but are heavier and more time-consuming.

Headlamp. Bring a lightweight LED headlamp, and make sure it has fresh batteries (unless you're going for more than a couple of days, forget the spares). If you plan to travel at night, look for a super-bright model like the three-watt Princeton Tec Apex Pro, although its lithium batteries are expensive and have a relatively short burn time.

Navigation. Don't leave the trailhead without a map and compass—and knowing how to use them. GPS units are excellent too, but add weight and are subject to battery failure (bring extras).

First-aid kit. This is light insurance, but go minimalist. At 4 ounces, Adventure Medical Kits' Ultralight and Watertight .5 has the basics; toss in a couple of blister patches (see Trail Tips, page 28) and you're good to go.

Personal items. Unless you relish wiping with leaves and grass, TP is a lightweight luxury. Also, bring toothbrush and paste, sunscreen, sunglasses, watch and any personal medications. Rookies get sucked into carrying too many other "accessories," which quickly add pounds.

Clothing. Bring your normal long-day trail-running attire, including:

- Trail-running shoes
- Socks (synthetic or wool; a spare pair in a waterproof baggie is a reasonable splurge)
- Running shorts or tights
- Technical t-shirt, short sleeve
- Technical t-shirt, long sleeve
- Super-light waterproof-breathable jacket or wind shirt
- Super-light rain pants (optional)
- Gloves
- Cap and beanie hat

Food. Bring food that offers maximum calories per ounce. Some can live on bars alone, but here is a less austere yet bare-bones menu.

- Instant oatmeal
- Instant coffee bags
- Sausage or jerky
- GORP
- Energy, granola and candy bars
- Energy gels
- Cheese
- Bagels or tortillas
- Freeze-dried dinners, or similar carbohydrate-rich, dehydrated foods like mashed potatoes,
- Top Ramen and couscous.
- Chocolate-covered espresso beans
- Tea
- Electrolyte capsules

Water. Plain and simple, water is heavy—one quart weighs two pounds. Carry as little as possible to stay hydrated, and determine your rations based on preplanned fill-ups at springs, streams, lakes, huts or campgrounds. Use hydration bladders or Platypus Platy-type containers, and avoid heavy bottles like the Nalgene.

Optional (be very selective here—do you really need it?).

- Trekking poles
- Point-and-shoot digital camera in waterproof bag
- Swiss Army knife (avoid heavier multi-tools)
- Notebook and pen (wrapped with duct tape)
- Lightweight gaiters
- Personal locator beacon
- Baby wipes
- Firestarter materials
- Lightweight insulated jacket or pullover

Reality Check. For a two-day, two-night excursion, you should be able to keep your starting load under 15 pounds, including food and a quart of water. Once you've got your kit whittled down to the bare necessities, take another pass and cut another pound (be a nerd and get a digital postal scale). You'll be glad you did.



ABOVE: With a 15-pound load, you'll have the mobility to run and be able to experience the freedom of the hills.
Photo: Patitucciphot

SKILLS, SKILLS

According to Ryan Jordan, Kevin Sawchuk possesses the special combination of an ultrarunner's fitness and an experienced backpacker's woodsmanship. Many runners, myself included, lack such skills. I overcame my backcountry inexperience by using a hut-to-hut trek to take care of food and shelter, enabling me to pack light enough to run the flats and downhills.

"The more skills you develop, the less you need to carry," says Sawchuk.

Backcountry fastpacking skills include knowledge of first aid, the right gear, emergency fire building, blister prevention and map-and-compass use.

"Trail runners are used to having their course marked for them with flags or at least cleared trails," says Sawchuk. "That

is not the case in the backcountry, where trails aren't always obvious and some of the most spectacular country is off trail. A good way to train is to take an orienteering course, then perhaps enter an orienteering race (see Adventure Racing, page 24) to advance those skills."

When transitioning to fastpacking trips, Sawchuk recommends initially planning treks that stick close to trailheads on fair-weather days, in case there is a need to bail out or change plans. And running fitness is essential.

THE DESCENT

Ultrarunner David Horton has run across the United States—2906 miles, with the third fastest time in history—won the first two Hardrock 100-mile races, holds

the speed record for the 2650-mile Pacific Crest Trail, is a former holder of the 2175-mile Appalachian Trail speed record and is looking to better the 2959-mile Continental Divide Trail record this year. He has seen some rough country.

In Horton's book, *A Quest for Adventure*, he chronicles his then record-setting thru hike of the AT. He notes, "Perhaps the most difficult descent that I have encountered was the 3000-foot drop in two miles off Mount Madison to Pinkham Notch. It is extremely dangerous and any slip would be disastrous." Which is our agenda on our final day.

Finishing breakfast and loading our packs for the last time, we worked our way up Mount Madison via the Osgood Trail, a steep, rocky climb. From Madison's 5366-foot summit cone, we marveled at the spectacular view of Mount Adams, the Great Gulf Wilderness and a sea of peaks marching into the distance. Madison Gulf crosses the Mount Washington Auto Road and becomes Old Jackson Road—a rocky two-mile stretch of trail that Keene and I had run with just hand-held bottles upon our arrival in the Whites. Four hours after leaving Madison Hut, we crossed the road onto Jackson's familiar terrain.

"Think we can do it in under half an hour?" Mike asked.

"I don't know, man, we've got packs on this go-round."

We trucked down Jackson, rocks flying underfoot, arriving at Pinkham Notch 25 minutes later, with nary a drop of water left between us. Total time on trail for the day was 4 hours 25 minutes, covering 7.8 miles.

Our three-day fastpacking odometer read 32 miles. We set no distance or speed records, but changed the face of our trail running. The Gulfside Trail challenged me in a way akin to Holiday Lake or the JFK 50-miler. In those ultras, I tested whether I could run 30 and 50 miles. In our White Mountains adventure, we covered ground to get to places most people couldn't, given the same time frame. To borrow Sawchuk's thought, we gave ourselves freedom.

Michael Valliant, 35, lives in Easton, on Maryland's Eastern Shore. When not running trails or trying to keep up with two young daughters, he is the director of marketing and media relations for the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum in Saint Michaels. You can follow his running adventures on his blog: <http://the4onerun.blogspot.com>.