

JMT
2014

"Those are some big fucking trees."
- John Muir

Sept 6th

Well, I'm in the airport waiting for my flight to Mammoth Lakes and I'm wondering if I should be sending out any last confessions of love; just in case I die out in the wilderness. I've done a multi-day trek twice before and it has never felt risky, but now that I'm going alone I start to wonder if it's a huge mistake. Of course, it's not. I'm excited for every part of this, including the suffering, but I'll feel better after the first day is over.

The plan is to spend one day in Mammoth, then hike 70 miles over 5 days into Yosemite, where I'll have 2 extra days to explore. I've got a map and compass, a pocket knife, and a whistle...

I feel really bad for people who take flying for granted. I grin ear to ear looking out the window, it's amazing every single time. If I ever marry someone, they have to be amazed by looking out a plane.

Man, I haven't been alone with my thoughts for so long. This is gonna be awesome.

I'm gonna go to environmental hell for this 30 min flight to Mammoth.

Without water, my pack weighs 30 lbs. I spent a good hour trying to pack it in this nice park. It is stuffed to the brim. The bear canister takes so much space. My food must weigh 15 lbs, so 1 lb per 1k calories. A guy on the shuttle was shocked I got mine down to 30 lbs, his was 40. There are so many birds in this park I feel like Snow White.

I'm drinking so much water. I want a bumper sticker that says "Pissin' Clear".

I fucking love Mammoth. Everything is so outdoorsy. There's a free trolley. There are a bunch of cute establishments. I'm eating at Shat's Bakery (again) because it's the best.

Sept 7th

So I made it to The Devil's Post-pile. Connecting from Horseshoe Lake to the JMT was a little confusing and 5 minutes after hitting the trail I had to take a break. I've been hiking 3 hours now and luckily most of it has been down hill. I went off the JMT almost as soon as I found it in order to pass by DPP. It's pretty neat. It's a wall of long hexagonal columns, It doesn't look natural or man-made. It looks like a

basalt crystal. Crystals are also unreal. I had my first snack. I'm so happy to start eating away at this pack weight...

Pro-Tip: Warm-tinted sun glasses are critical on the trail for maximum natural beauty.

Well, I've just set up camp. Things are a bit dim. Choosing a place to set up camp in the backcountry is stressful enough, but I also had to pitch my hammock for the first time. I heard it was going to rain tonight and tomorrow, so I stopped hiking at 5pm to set up camp.

The hammock went up okay with a bunch of stupid overhand knots (I did manage a bowline and a taught-line knot), but the rainfly just does not cover the hammock. If it rains, I'm totally fucked. I'm also paranoid I don't have enough white gas to hydrate these stupid soups I bought. I wish I had thought some of this through better. The only thing making me happy right now is this hot chocolate. I can almost ignore all of these horrifying woodland noises. I'll probably just crawl into my doom-hammock at 7pm and take an Advil PM. I can't believe this fucking rainfly isn't big enough.

As I lie here in a sleeping bag wrapped in a garbage bag, let's flashback to happier days. After lolly-gagging around Mammoth, I checked in at the Davison Guest House. I love this place. It's a self-checkin hostel, so essentially there is no staff. But it is the most picturesque A-frame lodge with a huge windowed wall, cozy colors and lots of wooden bear carvings. Better still is the nearly fully stocked communal kitchen.

Most of the people staying at the lodge this weekend were seasoned trail geezers, but of three different types. One seemed like a rich gear head, the other a grizzled traditionalist, and the third, an exuberant thru-hiker fanatic by the trail name of Pop-C.

We got to chatting and before long we were out on the deck picking guitar and banjo, A girl about my age turned up. She seemed to be a hiking-themed differ. She had a guitar too and so the four of us tried to strong a jam together. Rich Gear-head only knew blues and pink floyd, Pop-C only knew Polly-wall-a-doodle, and the girl played so quiet I couldn't hear her. I play like crap, but I was the back bone of that jam. Sometimes we all knew the same song, but only from different genre cover artists.

Back inside, I was trying and failing to go over my maps, but the old dudes would not shut up. Plus I had such an altitude headache I thought I was gonna explode. Mercifully everyone went to bed. I did pick up a few good tips like making camp on a saddle to avoid the wind and cold sinks. And that olive oil has the best calorie to weight ratio.

The next morning Pop-C said I would find my freedom on the mountain and Rich

Gear-head kindly drove me to my trailhead.

I should probably talk a little more about the trail today. It had it's ups and downs (ba-da-da).

Pretty much after the postpone it goes steadily up hill. It wasn't so bad at first, but then there is this, like, 5 mile stretch of nothing. No lakes. No sights. Just uphill trees. Without a way to mark my progress, I got increasingly miserable.

Before that section I had my lunch (tuna, pepperoni, tortilla) at this pitiful lake. You can really see the effects of the drought out here.

But eventually the uphill slog came upon a nice little lake and I squealed with joy. Now I could mark my progress again. After 2 more "okay" lakes, I finally ended up at Gladys Lake. It was big and clear and had a beach, so I finally took a decent rest. I iced my feet in the cold water. It helps so much. I especially wanted to ice my ankle, which I rolled quite early on today. It's bothering me. But no blisters! I had thought about camping at Gladys (9 miles), but it was only 3:30pm so I decided to make it to the mile marker at Shadow Lake.

Luckily the next 2 or 3 miles were mostly downhill. I passed Rosalie Lake which was even nicer than Gladys. It had really blue water and large rock walls along it's edge. Shadow Lake was of the same design, but was harder to see from behind the trees.

I'm camped a minute or 2 down the trail from Shadow Lake and I pray to God it doesn't rain and no bears come snooping around for the soup I spilled on myself.

15 miles

Sept 8th

Oh hey, I haven't written in here today. Before I jump in, I want to say that I totally regret taking this hammock. Every time I set it up I want to cry. Last night it rained at 1am, 3am, and 6am. I stayed mostly dry, but the hammock and sleeping bag got wet. I mostly aired the bag out by hanging it out the back of my pack as I hiked. On the bright side, it was a fairly comfortable night of sleep.

So part one of today was really nice. Right after Shadow Lake, the trail wanders up this valley that has a cascading river running through it. In the morning light, it was so fucking beautiful. Already the hike was so much better than yesterday, which was mostly in the woods. I can finally see the mountains!

"The mountains are calling and I must go." - JM

I knew it was going to rain again today, so I kept setting my goal destination to each

lake as it came up. The first big one was Garnett Lake, which a lot of people told me was really nice. It was really nice. The big awful mountain with a glacier that always looks dark was looming over the west side of the lake. I liked that the trail spends a lot of time at this lake: switchbacks down into the valley, then following the shore half way, then switchbacking back out again.

Since it hadn't rained yet, I decided to move on to Thousand Island Lake. I had a short rest here, during which I released a broken bag of green tea into my purified water. Gag. I couldn't tell if it was starting to rain or if water drops were just whipping off the water, so I decided to keep going. I was feeling really good at this point and was happy to have hiked 6 miles by noon.

The next section was called Island Pass and I would say it was a very gentle grade, but somehow I ended up at 10k feet without really noticing. It was starting to sprinkle a little bit and the sky was getting darker. It was definitely going to rain now.

The problem was that I was at 10k feet, so trees were sparse and I started to get worried about lightening. Luckily it wasn't thundering near me, but I decided to gun it to the next mile marker, which would (hopefully) be a little lower into the tree line. I really felt like I was flying, but by my watch, I was only going just over 2 mph, which means normally I'm going even slower...

Eventually it started to rain hard enough that my pants got soaked, but quickly I found out that if you just wait under a tree, the deluge will ease up after a minute.

I actually rather enjoyed that part of the hike. When I finally hit my junction, I stopped for lunch. While I ate under a tree, the rain more or less stopped. But there were still dark looking rain clouds circling the higher peaks and the weather report said rain into Monday night. At this point I was on the 2.5 mile approach to the highest point of my trip, Donahue Pass at 11k ft.

There had been a short deluge of rain only a minute down the trail and with the storm clouds, I knew I shouldn't attempt a pass. I ran into two dudes who were retreating from the pass to lower elevation for the night, so I decided to look for camp too.

The problem is that it was only 2pm. I had 4 more good hours of hiking, but looking for a suitable camp spot proved hard. I needed tree cover from the already present wind and I needed a set up that would hopefully keep me dry. At 10k feet and with this shitty rainfly, it was impossible. Let alone the rule of only using "already impacted" campsites. I basically destroyed the clump of trees I pitched my rig inside. The rain fly isn't taut, nor does it protect in the direction the wind is actually blowing. I wanted to fucking kill someone while I was setting it up. And THEN, at around 3pm, the sky over the pass is clear blue. It makes me think I should have summited. I heard it was a hard descent and I dread trying to find another place to

pitch this fucking hammock.

So instead I try to kill a few hours at camp. I'm on this alpine terrain with lots of large rocks. It has a great view of the surrounding mountains. That's where I was when I started this entry, sitting on the rocks trying to soak up the last of the warm patches, I got distracted watching the clouds. They were blowing away from the peaks they were hugging. They were moving so fast with considerable turbulence. It wasn't threatening or obviously bad (maybe they will blow the storm past me?) but I was mesmerized as I watched and increasingly filled with fear.

That's also how I felt a minute ago as I lie in my hammock (it's only 6pm) and cried a short pathetic cry. When the wind blows on me or a squirrel yells, or I hear a wind howl in the distance I become very afraid. Because it's nature and nature is big and mean and I'm just an idiot.

I gotta say stopping the hike at 2pm and then killing all those hours in a miserable dread of my own sleeping unit has me feeling like a failure. Things would be different if someone else was here, but it's just me and for some reason I feel more judged than ever. I can never tell if I "care too much what other people think" or if I care too much what my own judgmental ass thinks.

I have zero interest in using my stove or eating dinner (last night too- it was a disaster). I wish I hadn't brought it. I've been snacking mostly because I'm supposed to, but I don't particularly feel like it. I'm probably calorically saturated from eating at work 3 meals a day for a month. I hope I can shed this bloat layer that lifestyle has earned me.

Oh my god, if that noise isn't a jet plane, I'm gonna die.

I happen to see 2 other parties pitching tents just down the rocks from me. That makes me feel better that at least other people thought it was safe enough to camp in this location.

I can definitely tell that the foot of my sleeping bag is still wet.

I checked the map and I'm not as far behind as I thought. In fact, I'm not really behind at all. Tomorrow I'll do the pass in 2.6 miles and then descend 6.8 miles halfway through Lyell Canyon. If my sleeping bag is dry, I'll camp 4 miles out of Tuolumne, but if I get fucked tonight I can hike a big day all the way to the ranger station. Worse case scenario, I take YARTS to the Valley. Worse case would also include an epic tonight, but my sleeping bag, even wet, will keep me alive and if not I can get help from those tent people.

10 miles

Sept 9th

So last night actually ended on a positive note. As the sun was setting I knew I had to get out of my sleeping bag to see it. A giant pink cloud shrouded one of the more whimsically shaped peaks. But then I turned around and from my rocky patio a giant FULL moon had risen in a gradient of purple and pink. It was so amazing I did a little dance in my socks.

Plus it didn't even rain!

At this exact moment I'm soaking my feet in the most gorgeous green running river in Lyell Canyon. I feel weird stopping to smell the roses, but I don't want to have to stop hiking at 2pm again. Plus shit like this is the entire point of coming out here anyway. From where I sit on this rock in the middle of the river I can see the pass I came over and down this morning. I probably could have done it yesterday, but I'm happy with how it all worked out.

I definitely took the easy direction. All the downhill I did today-- I would die if I was a SoBo.

When I finally made it down into Lyell Canyon, the trail goes dead flat. It just follows along a gentle river for 5 miles or so. I like trails in the meadows because they are cut 6 inches into the dirt like I imagine they are in The Shire.

"It's a shortcut! To mushrooms!"

I also like imagining that the nicely built stone staircases in the wilderness are the ancient remains of Numenorean trading routes.

There were so many inviting natural water slides, but sadly it was too cold . Perfect hiking weather through.

I passed some conservationists. They were rerouting the trail to return what I was hiking on to meadow. Interesting.

I saw a lot of deer today. They are not afraid. I could hit one with a rock if I tried. They look more rugged than east coast deer, but maybe they don't.

About halfway through the canyon I started worrying about where I would camp again. My permit says I must camp 4 trail miles from Tuolumne, but it's only 2pm again and I don't want to have a 3rd short day. Racked with guilt, I just kept hiking. I passed an old dude leading a school of kids. I asked if he knew where I could camp and he said Tuolumne has a backpackers camp. "So you can hike into the meadow!" "Yay!" And the children all rejoiced with me.

And so I hauled ass through the woods to Tuolumne Meadows. The idea of "civilization" was so fucking appealing. Bear boxes to fit my entire pack! A picnic

table! I know I've only been at this for 3 days, but when I rolled up into that campsite you might have thought I was in fucking Vegas. Having a normal, sanctioned place to sleep tonight is such a relief to my anxiety. This backcountry thing is for the birds.

Right now I'm icing my throbbing feet in the beautiful stoney river that runs along camp. A giant granite dome (Lembert Dome?) is just across the way. I would never climb that, it looks like a lightening rod.

I wonder if I should try to buy wood from the camp host? There is a fire pit!

So they only sell wood at the store, which I was disinclined to hobble to. But I'll probably be there tomorrow. At the trailhead, a sign had just been posted: a forrest fire started in Little Yosemite Valley. They evacuated over 100 people off the trails and Half Dome visa helicopter today. They closed trails from LYV to Sunrise Camp, which means I can hike as far as Cathedral Lakes tomorrow (if the fire hasn't spread) and then return to Tuolumne, where I smartly bought a second night (because I didn't have change).

So basically, finishing the JMT is already a bust, unless something dramatically changes tomorrow. I got a map of day hikes. I haven't decided yet.

Is Yosemite ever not fucking on fire?!

So partly for that reason I am going ham on my fuel tonight in order to cook (2 servings) of this takes-forever-to-cook pasta bullshit.

I am actually hungry and excited to cook dinner tonight because I finally got a good day of hiking in:

15 miles! 7:30am-5pm and I have officially finally made it to Yosemite National Park. I just really hope I get to see the Valley somehow.

Cooking dinner was a complete bust. Good thing I'm at a campsite with trash cans or else I would have had to pack out an entire bag of sludge.

After dinner I attend a community fire circle led by a ranger. It's really nice. Then I can't find my campsite without a headlamp.

Sept 10th

I had a nice dry night of sleep last night, but it definitely got cold.

Yet again, I didn't want to get out of bed. In that way where you just don't want to deal with what's coming up.

This trip has been marked by my paralyzing indecision. Now that I can't finish the

JMT, trying to figure out what to do instead has been, in a word, upsetting.

If I could snap my fingers and be back in Mammoth, I would. But I don't want to be a quitter and I definitely don't want to spend 4 days in the Meadow waiting for the bus. Some guy offered me a ride to the Valley this morning, but that just made me more stressed.

So I decide to have a slow morning today and start collecting information. A backpacker shuttle leaves to the Valley at 2:15pm daily until the lodge closes. I can stay at the North Pine Backpacker campground for one night only. One weekdays, Camp 4 is not filling up. The Tuolumne shuttle goes as far as Olmsted Point. And most importantly, Olmsted Point has a trail that runs straight into the Valley! So that's the plan. It's a much shorter mileage than the JMT route, but it means I don't have to quit. I'll split it into 2 short days so I only have to camp in the Valley for one night. On the map, the trail runs close to the fire, but the ranger says it is across a canyon and is therefore quite safe.

Phase II is taking a zero day in Tuolumne.

Even after I had my plan, I was still freaking out and being miserable. But I mentally committed to taking a rest day here at Tuolumne and that I would enjoy it as a lounging vacation day that I deserve. No point being a sour puss out here.

So the first thing I did was change my truly disgusting underwear. Oh my god. I immediately felt better.

Then I walked down to the store where I bought a sticker and a bag of Indian food to eat tonight. I can not stand one more night of fucked up dinners. In fact, I may god back and replace my entire food selection.

The store has an attached grill. I got hash browns and a cinnamon roll and a coffee and I ate outside. I didn't really feel like I earned it, but it was soothing anyway.

Now I'm back in my hammock with the fly up so I can see the trees. I've been here for almost 2 hours already. I lanced the mega-blister on my little toe. think 3 smaller blisters merged into one blister that has encompassed 3/4 of the entire toe. Shit is so gross. I didn't really want to hike on that anyway. Then I read more of Fare Side of the Mountain, which is a kids book, but I really like it. It's all about living self-sustainably in the wilderness. I would have been enthralled by it as a kid, I bet. I'm glad I chose to carry it. Now I must decide what to do next. I should at least go down to the river to see more than campground trees.

I walked along Tioga Road to the Welcome Center. I love visitor centers because I feel like they put it all together just for me. This one was in a historic cabin from the depression era public works projects. Seriously that was the best thing this country ever did for itself besides National Parks in general. The visitor's center had lots of

quotes from John Muir. I always get chills when I read them, I'm not even sure why. They had photocopies of Muir's detailed journal illustrations, like very technical drawings of mountains. I was just thinking, "lol nerd" but then I remember that it's people like Muir who actually get shit done.

I had to leave the visitor's center because, even with the clean underwear, I smelled so bad I was actually embarrassed to be in public.

I'm really excited to go the visitor's center in Yosemite Valley. I hear when you are on the trail, you start fantasizing about a great meal or how great it will be to cross the finish line. I just want to go to the gift shop. It's probably a really good one.

Things I've Really Liked In Approximate Order:

Fish
Egypt
Neopets
Harry Potter
The Tribe
Lord of the Rings
Feminism
Nature

Favorite Movies

Lord of the Rings
The Fifth Element
Titanic
The Day After Tomorrow
Ghost World
The Avengers
Fly Away Home
A Knight's Tale
10 Things I Hate About You

Gosh I laid on those hot rocks for ages. It's this long cascading river over a stoney river bed. Some places the stone is wide as the river and some places it's just pebbles. A very nice place to lounge.

Food Tips:

- 1) Boil in a bag indian food (with extra olive oil for calories)
- No dishes! Quick! Can eat cold!
- 2) Caffeinated tea bags in water bottle instead of coffee
- 3) Less snacks, more goo
- 4) Seasoned tuna in olive oil pouches, pepperoni, and cheese wheels in wax = awesome

I've seen a lot of solo women of all ages on the trail. We must all be cool people. I

find the old ones really interesting. The camp host said the number of women hikers and mom's taking their kids camping was really rare during his lifetime. I can tell I'm ruining my knees. I wonder hoe the olds do it.

I sat and stared at my picnic table for an hour or two. Camping with people is more fun, but it was nice to sit too.

As the sun set, I walked down to see Lemberst Dome again. In the meadow, I walked right up on a deer that was just staring at me and it scared the shit out of me. These deer fear nothing. The sky was a really hazy soft purple and all the stones in the river were bathed in purple too. It was an extremely soothing sight. Just me and the fucking deer <3

I just realized what an extremely long trip this is.

At 7:30, I went down to the community campfire again. I love hokey shit and I love education shit and I would watch a dog lick itself for entertainment in the woods at night.

The ranger leading the circle was in the visitor's center I was stinking up.

We sang two songs:

In Big Tuolumne Meadows / the sun shines every day / In the summer sunshine / the summer flowers sway // summer comes to the mountain / but summer it don't stay / when you hear the song / learn to sing along / in the ancient way / still alive today / in Big Tuolumne Meadows

Tune of "Sweet Mary Anne" (? pretty little girl, marry you some day)
Gardener / way up high / black and white and grey-ey / remember where you put those seeds / when you're caching them away // i've got no wings / but you've got wings / can i borrow your wings to fly-y / carry my seedlings way up high / so they grow into the sky

The second song is about the Clark Nut Cracker bird, which is the only species that disperses the seeds of the white bark pine tree. They cache over 9k seed piles in the earth to retrieve during the winter. Apparently there is a video of one nut cracker diving 4 ft into snow for a cache, but as the ranger pointed out, some humans climb El Cap in 3 hours. That just made me laugh to think some birds are elite athletes in their communities.

Sept 11th

Today I hike the Snow Creek Trail from Olmsted Point to the Valley. I took the shuttle bus to shave five miles off my hike, but the driver was chit chatting and drove me all the way to O.P. instead of Tenya Lake thereby cutting off a total 10

miles. Today is gonna be a really short hike. I might have gone all the way to the Valley, but a guy at the bus stop told me there was an amazing camp spot where I intended to camp. I'll just go slow today.

I'm sitting at the lookout of Olmsted Point right now. It's a beautiful view of the canyon (presumably the one that separates me from the fire) and I can see Half Dome, but the entire view is shrouded in smoke.

Today was an extremely short hike, but I took my good old time and managed to stretch it out until 1 or 2pm. The Snow Creek Trail is nice hiking. Gas Station Guy said he likes it better than the JMT. The JMT would have had Cathedral Lakes and Sunrise Lakes and this trail, despite its name, had very little water. I filled up my water bottle from a sad little trickle.

The first part of the trail was lots of fun, following cairns. I made a bunch of quickly fixed mistakes. That already felt more adventurous than the JMT. The rest of the trail from there gently winds through an old forest. Huge pine cones on the ground everywhere and large red tree trunks. It was extremely peaceful. Very few people too. I spent most of the way:

In Big Tuolumne Meadows / the bears they never sleep / they're always on the hunt for you / and something good to eat / So put your food in a canister / or an old bear box / Keep an eye out on the sky / don't look away / cause the bears will play / in Big Tuolumne Meadows // In Big Tuolumne Meadows / they're lots of granite domes / they were formed by glacial ice / many years ago / grey and smooth as they are bald / they sure do kiss the sky / but come right down / if you hear the sound / of a thunder clap and a lightning flash / in Big Tuolumne Meadows

Pretty soon I came to the knoll Gas Station Guy told me about. Wait - backtrack - the trail leaves the woods for a while to follow the ridge of the canyon. That was really nice. The opposite side was rolling walls of granite. The only bad part was that the fire smoke really obscured the details. I could see fire fighter helicopters in the sky. Finally the trail crosses Snow Creek and I have a little break. I try washing my shirt but the smell remains. It's very hot here, btw. It's not a fantastic river so I don't stay, I'm holding out for this knoll and apparently amazing swimming hole Gas Station Guy said I could find. So, right. I get to the knoll. It's this flat rock out-cropping that breaks away from the woods. It's right before the trail switchbacks down into the valley. I know I'm in the right place because once you leave the trees, Half Dome is all right up in your view. It's huge. Basket Dome is to the right. I'm gonna have a front seat view of Half Dome out of my hammock.

Flash forward: I've got my hammock set up, reinforced against the wind with rocks. My view is AMAZING! Honestly, it should be illegal. Half Dome is my entire view right out of my hammock. Wouldn't it be funny if that wasn't Half Dome but some other infamous rock? Ha yeah it would. Man I wish my other campsites were this awesome. Glad I decided to do this.

So, anyway, after I scope out the knoll, I use my map to try to figure out where a "perfect swimming hole" might be. They shitty Snow Creek turns into a falls on the opposite side of the knoll, I follow it and viola! A GORGEOUS stream running over polished rock into a crystal clear, deep, perfectly safe swimming hole. I know it's gonna be freezing, but it's so perfect and I am so dirty. I strip down to my undies, creep to the edge of a little natural slide, take my cotton sports bra off, and slide in. Holy shit! I freak out and immediately assume I'm going to die the second I hit the water. Before logic catches up, I'm naked like a beached whale trying to belly flop my way onto a slippery stone. It would have been hilarious to witness. Once in the shallows, I rinse out my hair, sneak back to my bra. Holy crap that felt good. I spend the next two hours lounging on the beautiful stone, amazed at my luck.

Times like this I like the hammock. Ant's sleep, right? Tell me they will go to bed. And the flies.

Cooked yummy pasta sides for dinner onlooking Half Dome under the harassment of bees. I'm waiting for sunset now. It's already awesome. It's about 6:30pm. The sky is casting purple and orange light, very soft. The smoke seems to have cleared so I can see the domes clearly and even the valley below. The granite looks so amazing in this light. You can see all the striations and undulations. This has to be one of the most peaceful sights I've ever seen. A bird's eye view of a sea of purple granite, not a man-made thing in sight. I'm meh about nature during the day, but morning and evening light is unbelievable. I wonder how it became half a dome..

6 miles

Sept 12th

Last night was a very nice, crisp temperature, not cold like both nights in Tuolumne. I think I'm only at 6k ft. But, dear god, last night I got so scared. I peaked out of my tent when I heard foot steps and saw a baby deer (I think). I thought it was weird it was out at night, but it was walking away, so whatever. But a little later, I hear more foot steps. And some grass nibbling. I know it's not a bear, but the sounds get closer and closer. I'm afraid to look outside because the animal might be really close and I'd freak out. I finally peak out, but I don't see anything. But then the footsteps are so close I hear it nuzzling my pack just under my hammock. I'm so afraid the deer will stick it's head in. I turn on my light. I wish I could sleep with it on. Then I realize the footsteps are just the fly hitting the hammock in the wind. Duh. I chant, "it's just the wind" to fall asleep, but I don't really believe it.

Other scary things: Every time I'm thinking about bears, the next hiker I see makes me jump. Also, every felled tree trunk is a bear. I haven't actually seen any bears.

I finally peeled myself out of bed. The smoke haze has returned. I heard it's worse in the mornings. This is kind of a drag because the hike down into the valley is

mostly obscured.

It's about 2 miles of serious switchbacks right off the knoll. It was actually pretty unpleasant. My knees hurt from the descent, it was (and is) extremely hot and the gnats were out of control. Hiked the entire time batting them from my ash.

I've had a lot of time to admire Half Dome today. It really is famous for a reason. Apparently, it was never a full dome.

Once I got into the valley, I got a little disoriented. I walked past Mirror Lake, which had no water. I ended up walking to Happy Isles before I found a shuttle bus, which is how I found my camp eventually.

I just spent \$20 on a tiny pizza and (Mammoth Brewery) beer. The Valley is more like Disney Land than I thought when I said it.

I think I'm a little too tired and a little too blistered to enjoy the Valley. My feet are aching and I can't find a single establishment I'd like to spend time and money at. I should have known, as I do now, that sitting in a river is the best thing to do here.

I was looking forward to some ranger-led programs like they had in Tuolumne, but they didn't really have any that weren't just for kids. But, they are showing a movie tonight about rock climbing and I bought a ticket. I think that will be great.

I took the trolley around to Curry Village, Yosemite Lodge, and Yosemite Village. Yosemite Village is the best because they have some stuff that isn't just a crappy cafeteria.

Because it's the anniversary of the Yosemite Grant, they had a great museum about the park. They had this giant wood-bound book, like 10 inches thick, the cover with fancy inlay. It was the original registrar of guests to the park in the late 1800s. It was handwritten in columns: name, residence, arrival date. That is so fucking cool! I wish my name was in a book. They also had one of John Muir's tin cups. That seemed important. "Scenic Nationalism" is an interesting phrase referring to the sudden interest and pride in America's natural beauty in the 1800s. There was also a (recreated?) Indian Village outside and an Indian art exhibit. I'm glad they are trying to incorporate the history of the people who have lived here for 6,000 years.

Alright, so this climbing movie, lord have mercy. It was called "Finding Balance: A Climber's Journey", but it was 50 minutes of cheesy flute music, very long cross fades between nature shots, and a voiceover endlessly pontificating our "connection" to the natural world. Oh and lots of overly staged shots of the narrator drinking from streams, looking out at the moon, and -literally- running through fields. I hope the cheese-factor was evident to the rest of the audience.

There were some shots of (very impressive) climbing and every time the lady

behind me would gasp "oh my god". That was kind of cute.

There was a discussion with the filmmaker/narrator after the screening. That dude walked a very fine line between sounding totally crazy and making a lot of sense. He claims to be indigenous... "to the world", but he has an NPO that takes kinds out of Juvy into the backcountry- I liked that.

I have a solid night of sleep in my hammock. It's growing on me. So comfy, nice for daytime chilling, and a breeze to take down and set up.

5 miles

Sept 13th

You know, beer, it doesn't taste that good, but it makes you feel pretty good. I'm sitting in the shade next to the river at the base of El Capitan. Apparently, it's the largest granite monoliths in the world. Isn't it funny that the word "apparently" usually means "according to an authority" rather than "what is obviously apparent"? Hah.

So anyway, El Cap is pretty fucking big. It's like 3,000 ft, but I'm not like "damn that's the biggest thing I ever saw". But then when you try to see the climbers on it and they are completely invisible, you start to appreciate it's size.

It's not until the Ranger pulls out a telescope do I get a peak at the climbers. I also imagined the face of El Cap to look like it was covered in silly string, like an unmissable system of cables and porto-ledges and 100s of climbing parties. But it's not; only two parties and a soloist climb today.

I was just at El Cap Bridge for an "Ask a Climber" program. Actually they are Ranger Climbers. I never thought, but should have known that these exist.

The climbers are very tiny, even in the telescopes. They are aid climbing. One team is on the Texas Flake of The Nose (so named because of it's flaring start) and another is on Tangerine Trip. I watched them "climb" on their ladders and I watched one jummar up. Aid climbing seems dumb as shit. It's a narrow few who free-climb El Cap; my girls Lynn Hill and Steph Davis among them.

I spend a lot of time asking about aid climbing. I practice with the ascender/jumar. I love hearing the questions non-climbers have. A very chatty woman from PA starts asking me climbing questions, which I love answering. The whole thing makes me wanna crack climb so hard.

At one point an older woman asked: "And women climb?" The question is as profoundly sad as it is optimistic. The ranger doesn't miss a beat. "Yes! Of course, there's one now." He points to a girl of my age looking through the telescope. "You

can tell by her water bottle." It's a plastic bottle wrapped in duct tape for durability and strung with a rope to clip to a harness. She's a crack climber who got into it via her hisser. I love her.

The last thing I asked about was tension between climbers and the NPS. The ranger said it started in the 70s when a bunch of hippies spend an entire season in a meadow, causing damage and refusing to leave. This culminated in some sort of riot and thereafter the rangers were trained in police stuff. Over the years, free-wheeling climbers and straight-edge rangers did not see eye to eye. But now, many rangers themselves are climbers and the pro has come to appreciate climbing for it's historical significance. Plus the climbers are a major user group of the park. The Park has been trying to introduce programs that help climbers who want to live a season in the park do so in a mutually beneficial way. He says these days the tensions are way overblown. This ranger is a big wall climber himself.

After about 2 hours of climbing talk, I figured I had better leave so I didn't look overly eager (more than I already did). I had bought a bottle of Tioga-Sequoia Brewing Co.'s Half Dome Wheat. I took it to the river bank and drank and wrote. It was so fucking nice. I really enjoyed the climbing thing and seeing El Cap. I was having a really satisfied feeling. Have I felt lonely on this week long solo-trip? Not. At. All.

The lady driving the El Cap shuttle told me her entire health history, experience with alternative medicine, and extremely limited diets. Some people are chatty.

She did say something interesting though. She said she used to travel alone, but she lost the confidence to do it now. It's true, I said, if I don't make myself do solo-travel at intervals, I start to lose the nerve. It is definitely a skill that takes practice or else it gets too scary.

El Cap and those other granite giants all around this area are really pretty awesome. I don't think I "got it" at first sight, but I see now that it is an extremely unique and truly massive vista. The YARTS bus I'm on now is winding apst the most beautiful scenery. The valley is so long. You can see how the glacier got in there and carved it all away.

I was flipping back through my photos. I really did see some amazing scenery all along the way. Some of it was undeniable in the moment, but some of it I overlooked. I don't know if this is a personal fault or a product of hiking, but nature often felt like an obstacle to get past rather than to enjoy. And like I said before, lighting plays a big part. We are lucky to have such a beautiful world.

So I finished. I think I barely hiked 50 miles, instead of 70. Partly it was because of the fire, but I could have easily made up the milage. I only had one "big day", so really I felt like it was a leisurely vacation more than a physical challenge. But you could argue it was still a mental challenge. I did have some touchy moments in the tent at night. I should be proud of myself even if I'm not yet.

I didn't see any bears, which is disappointing when you consider how heavy the bear canister is. But honestly, if I would have had to scare away a bear I would have died for fear. That would have been a challenge!

I have a new interest in the life of rangers. They live up here all sequestered in little adorable brown cabins. I bet it's like college. If you know what I mean. I'd love to watch a TV show about NP Rangers. Maybe one day I'll volunteer with the Yosemite Conservancy.

I think I'd like to see more glaciers. Glaciers did all this amazing work and seeing them always amazes me.

Normally when I hike, I get "inspired" to do or make something when I get home. That didn't really happen this time. I just feel tabula rasa. But what did inspire me was the recreated indian village I walked through before I got on the bus. We really fucked those people over and we aren't even sorry. Their ancient knowledge of wild foods and medicines and crafts are disappearing almost completely. I want to learn how to cook acorn mush. I want to donate money to organizations that help save and preserve the native culture.

This is the most beautiful bus ride I have ever been on, bare none.

I seem to have lost my pen. Found one.

When I got back to the guest house after a tense walk on a dark mountain road, I felt a little overwhelmed. My daypack was missing (later found) and it was shocking to have to deal with people suddenly. So I slipped into the shower. Man that was nice. I was so gross. I'm still gross. It's gonna take another shower. Having clean hair was so refreshing but (since I hadn't found my day pack yet) I had to put dirty, smelly, damp hiking clothes back on. I nearly cried. Few things are as depressing.

I wasn't hungry, so I just sat in the kitchen chugging peppermint tea and listening to this PCT hiker talk for hours. I don't know the word for hikers like him. Like Pop-C, he seemingly lives on the trail. It is his primary residence and social scene. He is about 50, but looks like Santa. He and Andy (guest house manager) talk endlessly about the gossip of hikers. Hikers who are now dating, "yogi-ing" a ride from the 80 yr old trail angel, the recently police raid on Piute-Mamma's meth head pot den/backpacker respite. It's amazing how connected the community is. I barely spoke to anyone on the trail. Thru-hikers are strange. I can't tell if I want to be in on it. Santa talked about yogi-ing things a lot. It means "manifesting an act of kindness" like a ride or some food. He spoke really romantically about all these things people did for him. I have started to see first hand that backpacking makes you need the help of strangers more than normal and I think it's great that there are people who do nice things for others. But I didn't like the way he talked about it exactly. It starts to sound like mooching. Maybe I'm not free-wheelin' enough to rely so much on

others. I've definitely noticed that on this trip. I'd rather suffer my own consequences than ask for help. Not to a fault, but definitely a little bit.

I like meeting these weird old people living alternative lives. I don't want to live like Santa, but Andy seems cool. He lives as the manager of a sweet lodge with interesting patrons, bartends at night, has a girlfriend in SoCal, and thru-hikes the Sierras whenever he wants. He's kind of old too, but hip old.

I'm not sure hiking is so great and that I want to do it as much as these people, but I love that so many people are doing crazy shit.

Sept 14th

I woke up in the lodge to the cool mountain breeze and the birds chirping. I go to the kitchen and make a coffee in a rustic brown mug (the kind I really like). I sit on the comfy couch, looking out the open A-frame windows. I flip through books about the AT and John Muir. It's so fucking nice. Screw LA. I am going to live in an A-frame cottage in the mountains when I'm older. I'll bake bread, have brown ceramic dishes and crochet afghans. I want to live in Mammoth.

Two women about my age come to chat with me. They are moving West. More people living their life, looking for something new.

I brought way too much fuel on my hike. I used less than 4 ox. So I left 8 ox of full canisters in the lodge kitchen for someone else to use hopefully. Then I burned off the rest of the gas in my used one. I've never recycled one before, so when I hammered a nail into the empty tin, I was sure it was going to explode in my face. It didn't. It seemed to work.

I left the lodge and walked into town. God the weather is lovely here. A perfect September: warm with a crisp breeze. I could walk (downhill) forever here.

I stopped for breakfast at The Good Life Cafe. I had a turkey egg jalepeno scramble with hash browns. It was so fucking good. I cleaned the entire plate before the waitress came to check on me. Would go again.

Then I walked next door to the thrift store. I got some stickers and two leather purses for my future life. I'm excited for the next thing coming up. I wonder what emails I'll have when I get home. Hmm.

It was about 12:30pm by then and I figured I'd go see a movie before my shuttle to the airport. I watched a very uncrowded screening of "If I Stay" with Chloe Grace Moretz. I really like her. The movie is about a girl who's family dies in a car crash and she has to chose to wake up from her coma. It was like a tearjerker romance. The romance part was too juvenile for me. I can tell I'm getting older cause this teen romance shit is so transparent. But I liked the sad tragedy part. It's weirdly relevant

to this hike. Like, some times I'm not excited about life and even a sweet hike seems pointless. But then sometimes you are just like, fuck it, let's just do it anyway. Let's go places and learn things and meet people and make things. Let's go screw up our perfect life and then try to fix it again. That's all there is so let's just go do it.

That's how I feel on the flip side.

- JAM