

PCT trek is fulfillment of a dream

By **Jim Cornelius**
Editor in Chief

Yvette De Groes of The Netherlands had long dreamed of taking a very long hike.

"I actually wanted to do a very-long-distance trail and I thought I would walk from my home town all the way to the south of France," she told *The Nugget* last week.

But then like so many others, she read Cheryl Strayed's 2012 memoir "Wild: From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail," and she became entranced by the idea of hiking the 2,650-mile PCT.

The NOBO (northbound hiker) stopped in Sisters on Friday, having trekked all the way from the Mexican border. In her company was Casper Van Wigck, also of The Netherlands, who was joining her from Ashland to Cascade Locks before returning home to take up a new job in the paper and cardboard industry.

De Groes will continue to the Canadian border, which she expects to hit sometime between September 10 and September 20. She is confident that she will be among the one in five PCT through-hikers who actually complete the journey. After all, she says, 90 percent of those who make it from the Mexican border to Oregon finish out — and she's halfway through Oregon.

The 25-year-old Dutch woman prepped for three years for this adventure of a lifetime, researching the route, purchasing and testing her gear and getting her international paperwork and permits in order. She and

Van Wigck connected online and planned their rendezvous in Ashland.

Neither did any specific physical training for the effort. De Groes said she simply started out with 15-mile days and as she got in shape rolled up to as much as 35 miles a day, a pace she had to dial back when Van Wigck joined her.

"The PCT is training you," she said. "The day before will help you for the next day."

The early part of the trail up from the Mexican border was unexpectedly enchanting for De Groes.

"Somehow, I just fell in love with the desert," she said.

Part of the reason, she thinks, is that the challenges and perils of the desert crossing imbues a sense of camaraderie into the hiking community. They meet at the scarce watering points, and look out for each other. This creates a sense of community that both hikers marked as the most gratifying aspect of their adventure.

The trail isn't always a delightful playground for adventure. Entering the Sierra Nevada, De Groes got sick and ran out of food. All she could say about it was the natural thing: "Ah... this sucks!"

But she persevered and found the stretch from Mammoth Lakes to Lake Tahoe to be "very nice."

De Groes was fortunate in avoiding fire closures, but there has been no avoiding the smoke from megafires across California. She said that smoke in the area of Redding was so heavy "I could not see more than three or four trees ahead."

Van Wigck acknowledged that it is "sad, because the views aren't that great."

Van Wigck, 28, ran into trouble with his footgear early in his segment of the hike, developing a painfully sore Achilles tendon.

"I walked from Crater Lake to Bend in her sandals," he noted ruefully.

New boots in Bend are expected to see him through the rest of the way.



PHOTO BY JIM CORNELIUS

Yvette De Groes and Casper Van Wigck came to the U.S. from The Netherlands to hike the Pacific Crest Trail.

Van Wigck finds the landscape fantastic, where a hiker can go for days without encountering a town.

"We don't have that in Europe," he said. "Here, it's real backcountry."

Whatever the other pleasures of the long backcountry

trek, both hikers repeatedly come back to the camaraderie of the trail, where hikers will give socks to a needy hiker with blisters or share their water and food.

"Everything they had was to share," De Groes said. "It's really special."



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