

# TURES!

## TRY AND BEYOND



## ers Country

camp helped more than 1,300 thru-hikers gratis and is expecting to host even more this year.

Thru-hikers rely on the kindness of everyday people to act as trail angels, picking them up at McKenzie or Santiam Pass, dropping them off in town or driving them to the post office, Hike-N-Peak, the hardware store, or wherever they need to go. Local hiker Blanche Tadlock has been a trail angel for the last four years. As a senior hiker who has backpacked the majority of the PCT in Oregon, Tadlock knows firsthand the practical needs of thru-hikers and often senses the unspoken ones.

“I love meeting thru-hikers! As a fellow backpacker, I learn a lot from them on what works and what doesn’t,” she said. “Often they need encouragement and a listening ear. I’m still in touch with many I’ve helped in past years.”

Others at Sisters Community Church caught Tadlock’s passion for helping thru-hikers and this year a group of eight couples has joined Tadlock as trail angels. Phone numbers are listed at PCT trailheads and online to help thru-hikers get rides to and from town and deal with special requests like finding a dentist or recommending a restaurant. Since some thru-hikers may be on a tight budget, trail angels may let them camp on their lawn, and offer laundry and a shower.

Anyone can be a trail-angel but there are obvious issues to consider before you offer a ride or assistance to anyone you don’t know: First, are they indeed a thru-hiker?

Tadlock said it is easy to spot a true thru-hiker, “They’ve got the look and the gear. They’ll be in shape, very dusty and dirty, usually wearing a sun hat or bandana, hiking poles attached to their backpack and most don’t wear boots, choosing instead (sturdy and lightweight) trail-runners.”

Mary Bartholomew (Tinker, Los Angeles, California), said “Thru-hikers have the most compact setup. If someone has a bulky setup, they haven’t been



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carrying it for weeks/months.”

If you want to be sure you are talking to a thru-hiker and not a day-hiker or homeless person, ask clarifying questions that any true thru-hiker could answer without thinking. Are you SOBO or NOBO? What was your start date? Where did you start? (Campo, California on the Mexican border [NOBO], or Manning Park in British Columbia [SOBO]). Do you have a trail name (few won’t)?

Over 99 percent of thru-hikers are wonderful people. That said if they make you feel uncomfortable just walk or drive away.

If you are convinced they are a thru-hiker ask them how you can help. If it sounds reasonable, a trip to the post office maybe, great! A trip into Bend? Only if you have the time, gas and willingness. Often thru-hikers may offer to pitch in for gas.

Sometimes a person may only be a trail angel for a few minutes, offering a ride from Ray’s Food Place to the post office. The pleasure of meeting a

thru-hiker, finding out how they came all the way from Sweden or China or one of the dozens of other countries to arrive at this moment makes for wonderful connections and insights. What’s it like in their country? What do they think of their thru-hiking experience? Is it different than expected? How have your interactions with Americans been so far? The language barrier may slow the conversation a bit, but showing and extending hospitality to our foreign guests has its own rewards.

If from another state, what do they think of Oregon? What did they do to save up funds for this thru-hike? What will they be doing post the PCT?

On this unique human migration, costing a thru-hiker thousands of dollars and five to six months to complete, offering to participate in a small but important way in helping someone realize their dream is the real payoff. It may even inspire your own future thru-hike.

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