

TREKKERS: Local PCT hikers "Halo" and "Chief" halfway there

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"That was tough because we were not even two weeks in and hadn't really even found our rhythm yet, but that was one of many adjustments we've had to make along the way," said Melissa.

Sasha began the journey with the trail name of "Camel" based on her ability to go for miles without taking a drink of water, but it didn't take long before she earned a new name based on her ability to organize, lay out plans, and generally take charge.

"We referred to her as the CEO, but shortened that down to 'Chief,'" said Melissa, whose trail name is "Halo." "She just started taking ownership of the hike within the first two weeks and has continued being in charge of a lot of what we do."

Chief also has taken on more of the video editing for the pair's YouTube channel (HRC on the PCT), according to her mother.

In reflecting how the adventure has gone thus far, Chief said, "It's been a really, really amazing hike so far. Every section has something new to bring. One of my favorite sections was in the Sierras where we crossed through the five big Sierra

passes. For example it was so amazing to be up on the Muir Pass and to be able to look out and see forever."

Halo said that she has learned that being a through-hiker is much different from going on a shorter backpacking trip.

"If you plan a four-day backpacking trip you get to cherry pick the places you want to go and the sights you want to see, but when you are through-hiking you have to deal with what you get, whether it is the heat, the mosquitos, or whatever," she said. "The PCT continually throws wild-cards at you forcing you to adjust and pivot. Plus, the daily mileage we are doing is much more than what you would normally do on a backpacking trip."

Chief remembered the one time so far on the trip that they hiked at night to avoid the heat of the day.

"We picked a good section to do in the dark because the trail parallels the California Aqueduct for a few miles and it is barren country basically on a roadway," she said.

A particular highlight took place in late June near the Donner Pass when they got to join a group of fellow fiddlers led by Alasdair Fraser, a master musician and teacher who has performed at the Sisters Folk Festival.

"Chief and I are both fiddlers and had worked with Fraser in the past at his camps,

so we planned a big fiddle jam up there in the mountains," said Halo. "That was my favorite part of the PCT so far."

A video of the jam can be viewed on the YouTube channel.

Overall the journey has gone according to plan and the two are holding up physically quite well even as they have continued to average 20 miles a day. There is a downside to their fast pace, according to Halo.

"One thing we didn't foresee is the lack of flexibility we have because we need to finish earlier than most other hikers," she said. "We have met some amazing people who are our 'trail family,' but we can't readily take rest days with them just to hang out because we need to keep moving."

Halo, 49, admits that her body is taking a beating.

"You are hurting every day," she said. "My body is basically destroyed." Yet, she continues on, remembering that she heard from one through-hiker that it can take three months after finishing for the "hurt" to dissipate. She had plans to buy some new shoes on the stop in Shasta to help combat a very sore Achilles tendon.

A common issue among PCT through-hikers is either starting out with too much, too little, or the wrong gear, but Halo and Chief said that



PHOTO PROVIDED

Melissa "Halo" Stolasz and Sasha "Chief" Stolasz mark the milestone crossing the California/Oregon border along the Pacific Crest Trail.

the only gear change they have made thus far was to give up on the solar phone chargers and add an extra charging brick instead.

"After two different solar chargers not working out for us, we ditched them," said Chief. "Other than that, we have had all the right gear

from the very beginning."

Halo and Chief expect to be passing through the Sisters area in late July, where they will once again see family, along with friends.

"It will be exciting to make our way into Oregon," said Halo, "but we need to take this journey one day at a time."

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