

ISO Hiking Partners

A desperate plea for companionship from the outdoor editor. BY JAMES JOHNSTON

I am looking for a new hiking partner. Not a romantic partner. No, what I'm looking for is a fishing buddy, a river pard', a trail *companero*. A gentleman — or woman — of taste and learning. Someone who knows the Latin names for flora and fauna, someone who knows birds and their calls. A literate sort, someone who can quote Muir and Leopold on the trail. A camp stove epicure who pulls the fixings for red bean jambalaya and apple empanada out of his or her pack at the end of a long alpine traverse. A fly fisherman who ties his own and is always willing to share a pattern that's catching fish.

For years I've been making do with Matt, my office building manager. Matt has a lousy work ethic and is always willing to leave his job early to spend an afternoon wandering the Finley Wildlife Refuge with me. "Look at that weird f\$#!ing bird," he said in March, during the huge annual swan migration, "Damn, look! It's eating the pond crud!"

I have been known to bring high literature along on camping trips. Two of my colleagues, whom I'll call Bob and Jim (even though their real names are George Sexton and Jeremy Hall), like to reward my

thoughtfulness by vomiting Pico de Gallo chips on my books, falling into the campfire, and, while still on fire, wrestling me to the ground howling about caches of whiskey secreted somewhere on my body.

I once put another co-worker whom I'll call Bill (Gabe Scott) in charge of our provisions for a week-long trip in the high Sierras of Baja, Mexico. Bill packed a pound of coffee, 10 packs of cigarettes, 13 Snickers bars and a quart jar of peanut butter. And he wouldn't share the Snickers — or the cigarettes, either, as I recall.

This is the same "Bill" I got dropped off with by bush plane on a remote stretch of beach 150 miles south of Anchorage last September. I put him in charge of the peanut butter and kept all the food in my pack. Bill was delighted at his light load. Turned out it was light because he'd forgotten his sleeping bag.

The backpacking partner I seek doesn't need to shower on the trail, but he/she needs to have showered sometime this century. I shared a sleeping bag with Bill and his prehistoric smell for a week — me, Bill, and his peanut butter, which froze at night unless we kept it at the bottom of the bag. As it happens, Bill isn't the only one who likes

peanut butter: On our fifth night together, we had to jettison the peanut butter at the insistence of an 800-pound grizzly bear.

I need a measured companion, a cautious character who eschews reckless behavior.

Another Alaska buddy of mine, a fellow named Dennis Miller (who even looks vaguely like the comedian) once lost a bet involving a bottle of vodka and a half frozen moose outside our cabin at the headwaters of the Chuit River that resulted in a broken leg, punctured lung, severely mauled face, and smashed vodka bottle, among other things. I had to haul Dennis 15 miles on a makeshift sled to the Air Force surgeon in Tyoneh, who, fortunately, kept a large supply of Dennis's blood type on hand at all times.

I'm looking for a law abiding hiking partner.

I fell in with Earth First! during their last ditch stand against the North Roaring Devil timber sale on the Willamette National Forest in 1989. I've been hiking, rafting, climbing and drinking with them ever since. I dearly love my Earth First! friends. They are wonderful, passionate people. They are also alcoholics, degenerates and genetically criminal. At least the decent

ones are. The malcontents are endless trouble on the trail.

On one memorable hike my associate Mick Garvin employed a pickaxe, a carabineer, two feet of heavy duty webbing, a long piece of rebar, two cases of beer, 400 pounds of cement, and the fire exit from Max's Tavern to secure himself to an actual logging road east of Oakridge. That particular campout ended up lasting about 11 months, after which time our party was incarcerated on the third floor of the Lane County jail for a week.

Tame little incidents like that one have a statute of limitation that my attorney has assured me has expired.

Speaking of which, I need a partner who can get along with my other friends. My attorney, for instance, can be a fine camping companion, unless I bring Matt along. One recent winter night on McKenzie Pass Matt, my attorney (Lauren Regan, Esq.) and I, along with a few others, were watching a spectacular meteor shower at the top of McKenzie Pass. Someone brought along a bottle of tequila. Did I mention I'm looking for someone who can hold their tequila? Toward the end of the bottle Matt started yelling at Regan, "You're not a real attorney! You're just some weird f\$#!ing hippie chick who knows a lot of fancy words!"

The statute of limitations has *not* expired on what transpired next, but suffice to say....

I need a new hiking partner.

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