

John Muir Trail Fastpack

August 2-9, 1997

Clem LaCava

In late July, I sent a message and ended it with, "I'm fastpacking the John Muir Trail." Well, I'm back and ready to start writing a report. I'll write the report in segments. The report will be laid out similar to Tim Twitmeier's, Bruce Hoff's and Hal Winton's reports of their JMT Fastpack. They did a great job and their reports contain a lot of information.

My good friend, Larry Halford after reading about previous trips decided last winter to start planning for the JMT. Immediately, he asked his friend, Curt Ringstad to join him. Curt and Larry have an extensive backpacking, rock climbing, mountaineering background. Lots of experience! They know what it's like to be out there in the mountains for days on end. I did not have that experience. Larry asked me if I was interested last January. We run together, so he knew I would train for the JMT.

Fastpacking the JMT is different from an ultramarathon race, but it does consist of the three important requirements of ultramarathons; training, successful planning of logistics required in an ultramarathon race or adventure run, and in the later stages, having that dogged determination to just keep on going.

Of course, if you don't take care of the first two, all the determination you can muster, probably will not carry you to the finish. These are the parts of ultramarathoning, that I'm still learning. That's why this sport excites me so much. It's one hell of a challenge!

There were several other friends, Curt's and Larry's, who showed an interest in joining us for the trek but other commitments arose. Jan Gnass, from Bishop was on board and when he couldn't make the trip, volunteered to supply us at Lake Charlotte over Kearsarge Pass. I still have not met Jan, but I now know the effort he made to help us out. Jan, if I get the chance, I'll buy the best Wasatch! My best friend Jan and my son Paul supplied us at Tuolumne Meadows and Red's Meadow and drove Curt's car from Yosemite Valley to Whitney Portal.

In late June, Max Welker, from Tacoma decided to join us. I had never met Max, but Curt and Larry's description of Max was, "He's a nice guy and has lots of experience at 100 mile's and will finish." They were right! Max stated from the beginning that he may be a little slower on some of the hills, but not to worry about him.

Larry, Curt and I had read many times since January; Bruce Hoff's (8 days), Tim Twitmeier's (6 days) and Hal Winton's (10 days) reports of the JMT Fastpack. They provided lots of information, but as I was relaxing last week after the fastpack, up in the High Sierras, in Little Lakes Valley, reading their reports again, their words jumped out at me with a new found reality. The information there in those reports.

I'll quote, Tim, "There's a special section of trail through these mountains that provides spectacular scenery accompanied by some of the **most difficult trail in the nation.**"

When I read it the first time, all I could think about was the spectacular scenery, which draws us to run ultramarathons and adventure runs. I didn't spend a whole lot of thought on the second part of that sentence.

I will not keep you all in suspense, before I continue on with the report, but I bailed out Kearsarge pass on the 7th morning.

We reached Kearsarge Pass trailhead (178 miles) at the end of the 6th day. For two days, my feet were in constant pain. Every time we stopped, it would take about 120 minutes for me to get into a stride and forget about the discomfort.

On the seventh morning, I waved bye to my friends and hiked out Kearsarge Pass. It was hard to hike/run anymore. I didn't want to hold them up. Larry, Curt and Max did not want me to quit and would have changed plans, but the fun factor was a memory.

They finished at 4PM on the 8th day, similar to Bruce Hoff's trip! I hiked over Kearsarge and hitchhiked to Independence, Bishop, and up to Little Lakes Valley at Rock Creek Lake. **KNOW**, I should have crawled to the finish! How in the hell Tim Twitmeier, Bruce Van Borstel and friends made it in six days, is amazing!

TRAINING:

Larry Halford, Curt Ringstad and I had registered for Wasatch back in January. The John Muir Fastpack would be hiked/run one month before Wasatch. Larry and I were hoping, that the JMT experience would help prepare us for Wasatch and help us complete our first 100 mile race.

Curt has finished, I think 3 100 milers. Max Welker, who joined our JMT group in late June, usually runs a 100 miler in the summer and was registered for the Eagle in late August. Max had run the Whitehawk 50 miler with us in early June and ran the White River 50 miler the weekend before the JMT.

Larry and I have been training together since last winter. We were running about 200 miles a month leading up to Cool Canyon Crawl. In April, Larry went on a three week camping/backpacking trip to Utah, and I was a little busy organizing the Mt. Hood Forest 50KM, but during May and June, Larry and I ran over 275 miles per month, with over 50,000 feet of elevation gain each month.

Once a week throughout May and June, Larry and I would run for an hour and half with our packs on Mt. Hood Forest. Curt was training with his pack occasionally over in Central Oregon. On the last weekend in June, Larry, Curt and I went to Campground in the Columbia Gorge east of Portland for a 2 day pack training run with all of our equipment for the trip.

On Saturday, June 28th, we ran for approx. 9 hours, 27 miles and 11,000 feet of gain. We set up camp after 6PM. It rained most of the evening. Larry discovered he needed a new bivy sack, but all the other equipment worked out well. The next day we ran another approx. 27.28 miles, and 7,000 feet of gain. We enjoyed the first pack!

After this 2 day training run we decided, that the Bruce Hoff plan of 8 days and approx. 30 miles per day, 2 1/2 miles per hour for the JMT would be the plan.

Larry and Curt were able to run another long training run (30 miles, 10,000 feet of gain) in the Gorge July 1st without the packs, but I had come down with Campylobacteria and was out for a few days and missed that run. But, I recovered and was ready for the JMT.

PLANNING:

During the late winter and early spring, we discussed several times, the number of days, the food drops, etc. for the JMT trip. At that time there were three of us on board and we decided to go with one stove and one water filter. When Max joined up in late June, we decided on another water filter.

I would carry the stove, Curt the fuel, Max and Larry would each carry a filter. We always figured we would stay together. My father would be there to support us at the start, Tuolumne Meadows and then again the next day at Red's Meadows.

We would leave Yosemite Valley wearing just a waist pack. After reaching Tuolumne Meadows (23 Miles), we would change into the running shorts and shirt, that we would wear to the finish, and pick up our backpacks. We planned to cover approx. 30 miles per day stopping to eat in the early evening, stopping once a day to refreshen up in a stream or lake and then set up camp before dark.

We would carry no more than two days supply of food. We would leave Tuolumne Meadows with about a day and half supply. Jan and Paul would meet us at Red's Meadow with another two day supply of food in the late afternoon of the second day. Larry and Curt and Max mailed a five gallon bucket with two days supply of food and supplies to Muir Ranch, which we would pick up before noon on the fourth day.

Muir Ranch charges \$45 for each five gallon bucket of food to be stored at their ranch. Glenn would bring us each a two day supply of food in the late afternoon of the sixth day over Kearsarge Pass.

This whole trip personally fit in with my families plans for vacation and work. My wife, Jan and son, Paul after leaving Tuolumne Meadows would drive over to Rock Creek in the Little Lakes Valley, south of Mammoth to join us at the cabin. My daughter was already working at Rock Creek Lakes Resort for Sue and Jim King and my son Paul was going down to work for them until late September until the University of Oregon would start classes. Larry's inspiration for the JMT was a great idea for me!

EQUIPMENT:

I was wearing, running shorts, socks, Marmot long gaiters, white capilene shirt, Adidas Trail Response running shoes and sun visor. We each carried two hand held bottles of water.

After wearing the Adidas Trail Response for 14-16 hours per day and running through streams, the rubber tip on the front of the shoe, peeled back on both shoes. After about four days, it seemed like I could feel every rock on the trail.

Lowe Alpine Contour Mountain 50 Backpack	45 oz.
REI Down Time Sleeping Bag	42 oz
Outdoor Research Deluxe Bivy Sack	25 oz
Therm-A-Rest UltraLite ¾ mat	15 oz
REI Nylon Windbreaker with hood	10 oz

(Larry, Curt and Max carried a Poncho).

Polypropylene shirt, tights, cap and gloves	12 oz
2 bandanas (Used for everything!)	2 oz
Wind Briefs	1 oz
Pair of Therlo Socks	2 oz
Jacket, Capilene Expedition weight	10 oz
White Cool Canyon Cap	1 oz
Running Tights	6 oz
Extra stuff sacks	3 oz
Cook Pot & Lid	12 oz
Nalgene 32 oz bottle	3 oz

(Before camping or cooking at night we would filter extra water. I used the Nalgene bottle, Curt, Larry and Max would fill their bladders.)

Victorinox knife	2 oz.
Flashlight & batteries	4 oz
Misc. items (First Aid Kit, ankle brace, rope, whistle, lighter, foot powder, spoon, unblock mosquito repellent, chap stick, Advil, etc.)	32 oz
Cook Stove- MSR Whisper Light	14 oz
Food at the beginning and after each supply	128 oz.

We probably were carrying at least 18 lbs of food

Approx. 23 lbs.

The Lowe pack felt good on my back, but was not engineered as well as the Ultimate Direction packs. The left side of the waist began to tear and we repaired it with safety pins and duct tape. Larry and Curt used Ultimate Direction Voyager Backpacks and carried a bladder for water. Max had a Kelty backpack with a bladder for water.

I placed a plastic garbage bag in my pack as a liner and placed all gear and food in the bag. I also carried another plastic bag to place my pack in case of rain or a storm, since I did not have a poncho.

PACK WEIGHT:

Hal Winton in his report states, "twenty five pounds is too much of a burden for trail running" and Bill Hoff states, "A heavy pack "clips a runners wings" and virtually everyone who's done this trip returns wishing they'd gone lighter." I agree!

John Liebeskind, a friend from Corvallis who also completed a fast pack of the JMT, was always reminding us in the months lead up to the trek. "Try and reduce the weight!" A few days before we left, John gave me his 2 oz. mat 2 ½ by 2 ½ feet square to use I stayed with my Ultralight 15 oz mat. John used a sleeping bag liner (1 lb) on his fastpack, reducing his weight maybe another pound.

The Outdoor Research bivy sacks were warm. I did not get into my sleeping bag at night, I just used it like a blanket. I didn't use John's mat, because I thought by reducing the comfort factor, I would sleep less well. In retrospect, I didn't sleep any better with all the comforts I had.

It's a tough call on the food. I think all four of us had too many power bars, cliff bars, GU, etc. Above, I estimated that we carried approximately 2 days supply of food at all times, weighing about 8 pounds. As supply, the weight would be more, because we still had food left from the previous two day supply. We tended to just stock up in case of an emergency.

Before you make any decision on how much to carry and what equipment to use, be sure to experiment. John was comfortable with his mat and sleeping bag liner, and no stove for hot meals, because he has a lot of experience with that gear. We decided for safety reasons, that the gear we had was needed. I would suggest looking into a custom made pack, that weighs a pound.

WATER:

Our group had two water filters. The **Sweet Water Guardian** filters worked well. Only one time did we fill the water bottles without filtering. Filtering water every hour and half to two hours took about 20-15 minutes. I maybe a little more reckless at times and of course I didn't finish the JMT, but when I looked at those beautiful mountain streams, I could not imagine the stream water being more unsafe than the water in Corvallis, Oregon coming out of the faucet. Looking at that scenery, all I could think of was quote, "Life is Good!". This water just had to be good!

Hal Winton and friends and **RJurdine** in his book about hiking the PCT, stated that they didn't always filter the water. At times, some of us would get ahead and arrive at a stream and start filtering. The other member or members would arrive five or ten minutes later and start filtering. At times, these stops could get longer than 10 minutes. But, filtering stops were a chance to rest and check the gear.

THE DAY BEFORE (August 4th):

I arrived at Yosemite from the west around 1PM, Friday, August 4th with my wife, son and our old golden retriever, Rita. We planned to utilize what was available for the backpackers. Locate the backpackers parking lot and walk to the campground designated for backpackers. I had not been in Yosemite for at least 20 years and was not very familiar with the area.

I was excited that I was finally here and hoped I would soon meet up with Larry, Curt and Max. While trying to figure the correct to the backpacker lot, Curt, Larry and Max drove by. It was great to see that they had arrived. They had already picked up the permits. We then drove over to the backpackers lot. It was approx. 2PM.

Upon arriving at the backpackers parking lot, we discovered about a dozen cars scattered throughout the dirt lot, had smashed windows. The bears had been hungry the night before! We all decided we could not leave any food in the vans.

While my son was driving to Yosemite, I was in the back of the van, packing my food into my backpack. My plan was not to meet with the pack until Jan gave it to me **Tuolumne**. Since, my family was on vacation, we had brought along a stash of food for the cabin at Rock Creek.

Before, we would try and locate the backpackers camping area, the decision was made to take all of the food out of the cars and out the packs and place in the bear boxes. About 3PM, we started walking to the backpackers camp area. There are lots of restrictions: dogs at Yosemite, therefore Jan stayed at the parking area with Rita. I wish I had thought about this scenario sooner. If so, I would have driven down Highway 395 to Rock Creek, left the family vacation gear and the dog at the cabin at Rock Creek, then entered Yosemite Valley from the east over **Tioga Pass** with my gear and supplies.

Larry, Curt, Max and I located the backpackers camp area about 3/4 mile away. We reserved two camp areas and walked back to the vans at the backpackers lot, reloaded our packs with food (we didn't want to keep the packs in the bear boxes, just the food, for security reasons). We then walked back to the backpackers lot, set up our tents **10 yards**, and stored our packs in the bear boxes with the food at the camp site.

It was already after 5PM and it was time to go eat some pizza and drink a few beers, talk and relax. The pizza was good and the tent focused on the JMT, we were ready. About 7:30PM, Curt, Larry, Max and I walked back to the backpackers parking lot. We loaded up more gear and walked back to the camping area.

Tim Twietmeyer mentioned in his post that they used the Curry Village tent cabins. He also mentioned, that they left some items **Metabolol**, etc. in the car, covered. Our group decided leaving soap and toothpaste in the car was dangerous in addition **Metabolol** and power bars. After all of these bear prevention hassles, we may have gotten to sleep around 10PM.

I recommend avoiding the backpackers lot and backpackers camp area. They are not conveniently located near each other. I would utilize the tent cabins or reserve a camp site, where you can park your car right next to your camp area.

DAY ONE (August 2^d):

We started on the John Muir Trail at 640AM out of Yosemite Valley. We were planning on traveling at least 30 miles. This was a fun day. Larry and Max took several pictures of us from the start and throughout the day. We were running from the Valley with waist packs on. The load was light.

The scenery of course was beautiful.

Although, there would be considerable elevation gain this day, we did not think it would be a tough day, mostly because of the light packs, and the chance to eat an extra hot meal in the mid afternoon at Tuolumne Meadows. This was the only day we had a hot meal in the afternoon. Bruce Hoff ate three hot meals per day, as did Bruce Borstel who traveled with Tim on their JMT trip.

Because of the light packs, we ran 3 ½ MPH in Tuolumne, ahead of schedule. Larry and Curt were identifying the birds, trees and flowers, it was a fun run. We arrived in Tuolumne approx. 3PM. Paul and Jan were waiting. We ate a veggie burger and fries at the restaurant, and changed into clean shirt, shorts and socks. Max changed shoes. Because, we were so relaxed, we never left Tuolumne Meadows until about 430PM. Jan and Paul left for Rock Creek. We headed for Lyell Canyon.

The river was crystal clear in Lyell Canyon and the skies were blue.. About 6PM, we decided to go for a dunk in the water. After cleaning up, we decided to cook dinner. I remember Curt, Larry and I not being able to finish our corn pasta, because of recently eating at Tuolumne Meadows.

About 730PM, we started fastpacking again and a mile or so past Vogelsang Pass Trail Jct. we stopped and looked for a campsite. It was an easy day. Thirty plus miles put us on schedule. The fastpack was mostly fun. The inconveniences of the day before in Yosemite Valley were already forgotten. We were into the trip we had been planning since last winter.

DAY TWO (August 3^d):

Up again at 5AM! A few laughs, a few mosquitoes, a few small band aids placed on a few toes, both Achilles looked a little red, didn't do anything, used the socks from day one, and our food was still hanging in the trees. Breaking camp, eating, getting organized for the long day ahead was taking us about an hour and half this day and for all other days.

We dropped back down to the trail at 630AM and on our way. Almost immediately, we saw bear tracks all along the trail. Apparently, the bear has his or her route picked out every night. Just walk the trail and look for food. Sure enough, we came upon camp, whose food hanging didn't work.

Within 34 miles, we had climbed up to about 9,500 feet on our way to Donahue Pass (11,050). The camping areas up here (35 miles), along a stream with great views of Lyell Canyon would have been a better campsite for Day One. Donahue Pass was not a particularly hard climb, but, with 225 lbs on our backs, 2 ½ MPH would be a challenge.

We were aware of Hal Winton's comment, "that the run to Red's Meadow was difficult, but beautiful", and Tim Meyer's comment, "We made it to Red's Meadow, well behind schedule." We knew it could be a slow run.

The trails around Thousand Islands, Ruby Garnett, Shadow, Rosalie and Gladys Lakes were hard to run, especially on the hills. We got some strange looks from the fisherman along the lakes. We stopped for lunch at Garnett Lake. Lunch was also a filtering stop and usually consisted of a Pemmican bar with peanut butter, and some trail mix. It was around 1230PM and we had miles, with a lot of downhill, to reach Red's Meadow and meet Jan and Paul for another food drop.

Our earlier thought of arriving at Red's Meadow by 4PM, eating a hot meal, cleaning up, relaxing and being ready to take off when Jan and Paul arrived with the food at 530PM was in jeopardy.

Shortly after passing Johnston Lake, we all made a wrong turn down a gorge following the stream. Hal Winton mentioned in his report about missing the trail a few times along this section. Larry and Curt were feeling pretty good, Max and I were slowing down a little. With 23 miles to go, I told Larry and Curt go ahead to Red's Meadow, I'll catch up!

I felt a little behind. This day was hard! I eventually crossed the bridge leaving the Desolation National Monument. The large trail sign after the bridge included an arrow pointing towards the trail junction ahead. At the trail junction, the trail went north and south. But the sign at the junction did not reference the JMT. My map showed another trail going east. I ran north for awhile, then south, then back to this junction, looking for a the JMT trail going east. After wasting about 20 minutes, I finally noticed, off to the right, not clearly visible from where I was standing, a small trail going east. I followed the trail and eventually found the JMT sign was getting frustrated and mad at myself because I didn't want to slow my friends down.

I'm running along this trail and Max comes running towards me. He was confused. He had reached the end of this short trail section a parking lot. He thought he had gone the wrong way and returned. We pulled out the maps and ran back to the parking lot and eventually found our way to Red's Meadow at 5:45 PM.

I went right to the restaurant and ordered a turkey sandwich, fries and a coke. I ate it, but didn't have much of an appetite. My son sitting there with me and from the look in his eyes, he must have been thinking, "Dad, is the JMT more than you can handle." I started thinking, I better perk up a little and get ready.

Jan and Paul had brought along the next two days supply of food. We repacked our bags, but once again, we wasted too much time at Red's Meadow, just like at Tuolumne. I had contributed to the delay. In my haste to regroup and get ready, I forgot to change shoes and socks, which I had planned to do. At 7:30 PM, I gave Jan and Paul a goodbye and started up the trail. Twenty minutes later, we discovered after climbing up the trail, that we were on the wrong trail again. We returned to Red's Meadow, over to the corrals and followed the correct JMT trail.

It was now about 8:15 PM, getting dark, and we hadn't covered many miles since 4 PM. We hiked up and along the trail in the dark a few miles and set up camp. We had a plan of approx. 30 miles per day, but earlier had thought that after two days, we would have covered 65 miles or more, giving us a cushion for the harder days ahead.

The decision was made to set the alarms for 4:30 AM the next morning. Larry and Curt may have remembered Tim Meyer's group decision to start the 3rd day at 4:30 AM after not meeting their goal. I didn't set my watch, I knew I would hear everyone waking up. Actually, as I laid there trying to go to sleep, I was hoping they would all sleep in a little. 4:30 AM just sounds a little too early.

DAY THREE (August 4th):

No such luck! We arose at 4:30 AM! I placed a few more band aids on three toes and larger band aids on the each Achilles and put my one spare pair of socks and later rinsed the other pair in a stream.

The Red's Meadow part of our trip was a little hard to forget. I personally vowed to myself never to fall behind again. I was questioning my ability to stay on course, if tired and by myself. After those few wrong turns, we never made another wrong turn.

Max must have memorized most of the maps, he always had a pretty good idea of what was ahead. Curt was still making up songs if you are all so lucky to be running along side of him. As a watch, you may hear a few JMT compositions. Just like Tim's group, when we stopped for water, we would discuss strategy. We were still laughing, Larry and Curt were still identifying birds, flowers and and the scenery was beautiful.

We stayed up along a ridge and remained in the 9,000 foot range for 14.5 miles. Virginia Lake was absolutely beautiful. Hal Winton and Ken Hamada had picked a spectacular place to camp on their trip. Eventually, we made the climb up and over Silver Peak (10,900).

During the morning, I slipped into a stream and somewhere along the trail, I lost one of my socks that was drying on the pack. I now only had one complete pair of socks for the duration of my run. From this point on, the JMT followed the pattern described by Bob Hoff;

"You go along a rushing river, lined with aspen and pine trees. The trail climbs gradually, crossing the river's tributary streams, and passing through meadows. (The meadows are amazing, in that their lushness contrasts with the steep canyon walls and mountains all around.) The trail passes some lakes, and aspens. The trees thin and disappear, the wind picks up, the air cools, the surroundings become rocky and barren. The trail switches back and climbs, nearing jagged glacial arêtes, passing lifeless ponds of melted snow, and snowbanks. The trail finally reaches a gap in the knife ridge defining a concave amphitheater, miles across. Over the top, the trail descends quickly, switchbacking down towards new high mountain lakes, streams, meadows and eventually into a lush canyon, reversing the scenery previously seen. Bottoming out at a river, the trail turns up another canyon and heads uphill toward another pass. There are subtle changes in the character of the wilderness as the trail progresses: The northern section is dominated by granite domes, elsewhere one sees more volcanic spires....."

After Silver Pass, the descent along the North Fork Mono Creek was really nice. The creek was just roaring. The next time, I'm up at Rock Creek in the Little Lakes Valley, I may hike/run a TWO DAY pack up over Mono Pass, along the Mono Creek Trail, and part of the JMT along the North Fork Mono Creek and over McGee Pass trail.

We arrived at the Junction of Quail Meadows (86.5 miles, Elevation 7,700) around 630PM. We decided to cook dinner and rest. This is the junction that would lead to the Vermillion Resort. Originally, Vermillion was considered as a supply stop. **Hot food at Vermillion** unlike Muir Ranch.

After dinner, 730PM, we decided we would go on to the Bear Creek Trail Junction, 2,200 feet in 4 ½ miles. It was at this time, I think, I started to get into the mode of, "let's get there and get this climb over with." The climb up to Bear Creek Ridge was probably as hard as any of the climbs over the mountain passes. I just got into high gear, didn't say a word, and relentlessly led the group the trail reaching the junction and camp area in the dark at 915PM. We were too tired to hang the food. This was a 15 ½ hour day. We piled all the food in the center of all of our camp spots, stacked a few rocks right outside the tent and went to sleep. If anyone heard a bear, just get up and throw the rocks at Smokey. We were at the 91.1 mile mark after three long days. The weather had been good!

DAY FOUR (August 5th):

On the trail at 610AM! The morning runs were always the most enjoyable. Like Day Three, most of the morning, we remained in the 9-10,500 range. Selden Pass (10,870) was not a hard climb and the trail by Heart Lake and the Keyes Lakes included some pretty good running. I wish we could have stopped and relaxed at the Keyes lakes, but we wanted to get these miles in fast while our packs were light. Later, at Muir Ranch, 108 miles, we would find a supply.

I wasn't as excited as my friends were about reaching Muir Ranch. They mailed some food to excite the taste buds. I made the mistake of mailing along the same menu, that I had been eating for four days; oatmeal, powdered milk, M&M's, J&J, Cytomax, Pemmican bars, peanut butter, power bars, cliff bars, GU, Corn Pasta and a freeze-dried meal. Sun Chips, Coke, Dried Fruit, M&M's, Cookies, etc. should have been mailed. John Beskind and friends mailed 100 power bars on their trip. John has a slide of himself, laying on the ground with 100 power bars dumped all over him.

We pushed hard down to Muir Ranch (78,000) elevation, arriving about 1PM. At this time of the day and at this elevation it can be pretty hot in the Sierras, compared to the Cascades. Our energy level was fading in the early afternoon and we were facing a tough climb. This would be the first of three consecutive days, that we would start a 4,000 ft. climb in the early afternoon. In addition, today, our packs would be the heaviest of the trip.

At Muir Ranch, we gave away extra food to a few backpackers. I bandaged the back of my foot at Muir Ranch. The heels and Achilles were cut, raw and in pain. We met two hikers, who weren't fast packing, but were traveling light. They had read Red's book. They were enjoying their John Muir trip.

About 2PM, we left and started the hot, climb towards Evolution Valley. Similar to Day Two heading towards Red's Meadows, I was out of energy. I hadn't eaten much at Muir Ranch or throughout the morning. I just didn't have a great appetite. The combination of lack of sleep, 85-90 degrees and heavy packs, made for a tough afternoon. Max was feeling OK, but, he didn't want to push the climb out of Muir Ranch. Larry and Curt were moving slower than usual, but Larry always seemed to have enough energy to lead the way. While leaving Muir Ranch, I thought to myself, should I exit at Selden Pass. This was the first of an occasional thought of exiting early from the trip.

There were some waterfalls on Evolution Creek and we climbed to the Meadows. We had to make a crossing of approximately 100 feet across the creek at the entrance to Evolution Valley. Curt, Max and I just walked across the knee high creek, Larry took off his shirt. It was already early evening and my socks and shoes would still be wet the next morning.

We all decided after reaching Evolution Meadow, to hike a few more miles, camp early, cleanup and get some needed rest. We camped near Colby Meadows (11,840). The mosquitoes were terrible. I remember holding the rope for the bear hanging, while Larry was tying on one of the stuff sacks of food, and the mosquitoes were all over his hand. He dropped the bag and we had to start over. The only relief from the mosquitoes was inside the tent's. Repellent was useless.

Inside the tent, I tried to work on my feet again, now, rather than at 430AM the next morning. I didn't have any moleskin, so I bandaged both Achilles and three toes on the right foot. We only hiked/ran 27 miles this day, but camped early enough for more rest and an opportunity to clean up a little.

DAY FIVE (August 6th):

On the trail at 6AM and rested. Within a few miles we came to Evolution Lake (122 Miles). This would have been a great place to camp. The scenery was spectacular! We filtered and started at Muir Pass (11,955).

On the way down from Muir Pass before Helen Lake, four backpackers called out to us from their camp spot. They were friends of Jan Gnass, who were on a backpack trip from North Lake to South Lake. It was great to see friendly faces. They offered to fill our water bottles, we chatted for awhile, and they wished us good luck.

The descent from Muir Pass was very slow and hard to run for the first few miles until we entered Conte Canyon. A mile or so before Big Pete and Little Pete Meadow and all the way to the Bishop Pass Junction, we were cruising (maybe 3 miles an hour!). During this stretch I completed my first face plant on the trail, but, my two hand held bottles survived.

At the Bishop Pass Jct., we filtered more water in Dusy Branch stream. The next 3.3 mile section of the Canyon to the Palisade Creek/Mather Pass Jct., was real fast. We ran this section in less than an hour.

Once again, we were down at 8,000 feet, in the early afternoon, with a 4,000 foot, 10 mile climb to Mather Pass ahead. It was hot! All running for the day was over. The hike up the Golden Staircase would be long and slow. Max told us to go ahead and not to wait for him, he would meet us up at the Palisade Lakes.

The 3 ½ mile hike/run to Deer Meadows was hot. The steep climb up the Golden Staircase to the Palisade Lakes was a tough climb and we hadn't seen Max in quite awhile. We finally stopped on the rocks, high up above and between the two Palisades Lakes. I arrived about 630PM. We decided to start cooking dinner and hope Max would arrive soon. Curt, Larry and I decided, that for the rest of the fastpack, we would not continue fastpack, unless we had the other members of the group in sight.

Two backpackers came by in the opposite direction. I asked them if they had any information about Mather Pass. I was considering hiking out over Mather Pass the next day, and trying to hitch a ride. But, they informed me that it was pretty remote, and that I might have a tough time hitching out.

We started cooking dinner, when Max arrived. We were glad to see him. He was only about thirty minutes behind us, but we hadn't seen him in at least four hours. After dinner, we hiked farther up toward Mather Pass and camped at about 11,000 feet. This was approx. mile 147 of the JMT. We just piled the food bags. It was very beautiful up here, our highest campsite. While relaxing, looking over the maps and discussing strategy for the next day, we realized that Charlotte Lake/Kearsarge Pass was Mile 178 and not Mile 172. For most of the hike up the Golden Staircase, Larry, Curt and I were thinking, that we may be able to meet up with Jan Gnass and the last food drop, the next day in the late afternoon or early evening. But, now that we realized Charlotte Lake was 31 miles away, we knew we would be lucky to make it before dark.

DAY SIX (August 7th):

On the trail at 545AM, our earliest start of the trip. We would need to hike over three passes today to reach Charlotte Lake before dark. The view from Mather Pass (12,080) was great, especially the trail ahead.

After a short rocky section of a ½ mile or so, we were able to run. I just downed the painkillers to help kill the pain in my feet and off we went. It was about a three mile run downhill before, we would hit the tree line again. Between Mather Pass and Pinchot Pass, we wouldn't drop below 10,000 feet. Great! We had all adjusted to the high altitude and preferred to stay high.

Another great morning of running, but every time we stopped to regroup or filter the water, it was very hard for me to start running again. It would take me about 15 minutes after starting the Muir Shuffle, before I could relax a little and forget the pain.

The King Canyon wilderness was spectacular. After 6.5 miles we reached Taboose Pass trail intersection. Curt ran right past it. Curt never missed an intersection. We usually stopped at intersections to check the map. There was no sign at this intersection, I saw the trail heading east. We noticed that someone had hung a stuff sack of food, for some backpackers.

The next three miles were a 1,500 foot climb to Pinchot Pass (12,100). Another great view and we met a 65 year old woman on a solo backpack of the JMT. She was hiking from Bishop Pass/Kearsarge Pass and out. We had traveled about 10 ½ miles in four hours over two passes by 10AM. We started to think, maybe we could reach Charlotte Lake by the evening.

We continued on down the trail passed the Sawmill Pass Jct. to the South Fork Trail Jct. and crossed Woods Creek. The single person suspension bridge over Woods Creek is unique. We decided to rest, eat lunch and filter. It was only 1230PM and we had fastpacked about 17 ½ miles.

After lunch, we started the 2,000 foot, 3.7 mile climb to Dollar Lake. At Dollar Lake, the signs warned us about serious bear problems and recommended no camping. We filtered, then it started to rain. We went for some cover, and put on our parkas and windbreakers, and started hiking again. Around Arrowhead Lake, it started to really storm and get colder. Again, we went for cover and put on our polypropylene shirts and Curt, Larry and Max put on some waterproof pants. I didn't have any. We then continued

until the storm turned to hail. Huddled together, sitting under a tree, chilled, we all looked a little frustrated that our push for Cha Lake Jct. and possibly meeting John was in jeopardy.

Eventually, after a 30-45 minute delay, and the storm subsiding a little, we continued on to generate some heat. At Rae Lakes, it finally stopped, we filtered and continued a very steep climb up Glen's Pass (11,980). The descent off Glen's Pass was able. We could see Charlotte Lake off in the distance, but realized it would be dark before we got to the Jct.

After arriving at the Jct. of Charlotte Lake and the JMT by flashlight, we found a note from Gons. He had waited all day from noon to 7PM for us to arrive. It was after 8:30PM. His note directed us to the food hanging in Gons. Gons really made a great effort bringing in our supply and hoping to connect up with us. After finding the food, we decided to hike down off the JMT a mile to lake for water and bear boxes. The first boxes were full and by the time we found room in a box and a campsite, it was after 10P

I could hardly walk at this time. We decided we were too tired to cook a dinner and filter water and decided to go to sleep. After 16-17 hour day, three mountain passes over 12,000 feet and 32 miles to the lake, I laid my hand and decided, I was done and would hike out over Kearsarge Pass in the morning.

DAY SEVEN (August 8th):

Up at 6:30AM, We all were trying to figure out how to stuff all this food into the packs. We gave some away to a few backpacker On the trail at 8AM. At the Kearsarge Pass/JMT Jct., I volunteered to carry out all of the trash. Larry got out his camera to take our last picture of me. I stood there smiling, waving and said, "Good Luck guys! It's been fun!" They thought I was in good spirits and could have finished, but didn't try to change my mind. It was my decision.

The steep, lonely hike up Kearsarge Pass (11,700) was slow, and the clouds were already forming. I made it over the top and a mile or so down the pass before the storm hit. I ran for cover. The same storm was coming down on my friends as they were heading towards Center Basin along the JMT. It was early in the morning. Later, I heard from Larry, Curt and Max, that for a few minutes they had wondered, if they had made the right decision. Could this have been the start of a series of day long storms.

But, the storm subsided and we all continued on to our destinations. I finally reached the trail head and campground at Onion Valley. I had covered 187 miles. I immediately began hitchhiking down off the mountain to Independence. Upon arriving at Independence went into the general store to inquire about a bus or shuttle. No luck! I bought a comb. I hadn't combed my hair in a week. Stopped at the Subway for a sandwich, sat by myself and wondered if anyone would pick me, smelling like I did.

I decided to pay a motel owner \$10 for a shower. Washed my running shorts and shirt in the shower and put them back on. It was about 100 degrees outside, and I knew my clothes would dry instantly. I very slowly walked to the edge of town and started hitchhike ride. After an hour, I was getting anxious for a ride, standing there in the heat, so I got out a \$20 bill and held it in my hitchhike hand hoping someone would get the message, that I was willing to pay for the ride.

A stockbroker from Pasadena stopped, he refused the money. He had a cell phone and offered to make a call to my family and drive me all the way to Tom's Place. What a nice guy and he was interested about the JMT trip! I went right to the old Tom's Place Tavern for several Sierra Nevada drafts and started to think about my friends and hoping they were having a good day.

Larry, Curt and Max enjoyed the running in the last section of the JMT and covered 25 miles finishing up the seventh day in the canyon. The next day they would climb Mt. Whitney and finish up at 4PM, Saturday, August 9th. On the top of Whitney, they needed all the warm clothes they had with them. They had completed the 222 mile John Muir Fastpack.

This week when Larry and I saw the results of the Wasatch Front 100 Mile Endurance run, which Larry, Curt and I completed last weekend, we noticed Bruce Hoff's impressive, sub-24 hour time, and thought no wonder the 8 day plan was so hard. This guy is one hell of a runner!

WRAP UP!

Is the John Muir Trail fastpack worth doing? You better believe it! It's so beautiful! I wish, I could just beam myself down to any number of places, such as Virginia Lake, Pinchot Pass, Evolution Lakes, Garnet Lake, Rae Lakes, the Golden Staircase Pass and many others and just sit and relax for awhile.

If you ever decide to do the fastpack; be sure and train, experiment with your gear, do at least one overnight fastpack, take care of your feet early in the trip, be sure all members of your group have similar running abilities and make a good plan before you start. There are so many variables doing this trip, make room for a little flexibility. Would I suggest that you, make a plan, that may not

push your limits, maybe. But, I know you all marathon runners and after meeting many of you on the trail Wasatch Front this past weekend, I don't think we do these things because their easy.

Larry and Curt finished Wasatch in 28:46. I finished in 29:19! The JMT pack prepared us well for the up hills. I never thought during the race, I would quit Wasatch, my first 100 mile finish, thanks to the JMT experience. I wrote this down, mostly for myself. Thanks for listening! Run long, run hills, and maybe someday back of the John Muir Trail.

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Your welcome to contact my friends for further information:

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DATA FROM OUR TRIP:

Day	Mile	Name of Camp	Elevation Gain	Passes Hiked	Left Camp	Trail Supper	Into Camp	Hang Food
1	30.5	Lyell Canyon	7,430	Cathedral Pass	640AM	Tuolumne Meadows 3PM and along trail	830PM	Yes
at 630PM								
2	60	Few miles Past Red's Meadow	5,830	Donahue Pass	630AM	Red's Meadow Grill	945PM	Yes
3	91	Bear Ridge Trail Jct.	7,220	Silver Pass &	6AM	Yes	915PM	Pile

The Climb to

Bear Ridge was a bear!

4	118.5	Colby Meadow	4,200	Seldon Pass	610AM	No	615PM	Yes
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Evolution Valley

(We picked up ourResupply atMuir Ranch between 1 & 2PM.)

5	147+	Above Palisade Lakes	5,550	Muir Pass	6AM	Yes	845PM	Pile
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6	179 (Storm)	Charlotte Lake	6,390	Mather, Pinchot, Glen Passes	545AM	No Supper at All	1015PM	Bear Box
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(We located theresupply carried in by JanGnass, hanging in a tree at 9PM)

7	204 (Storm)	Beyond Crabtree Ranger Station	5,510	Forester Pass	8AM	Yes	9PM	Yes
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7	187 (Clem) (Storm)	Onion Valley Campground	1,200	Kearsarge Pass	8AM	Sierra Nevada's At Tom's Place		
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8	221	Bishop	3,870	Mt Whitney	7AM		4PM	
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Max, Larry and Curt finished at 4PM. Jan and my friend Glen Young had their car parked at the trailhead. They drove to Bishop and celebrated. Congratulations! What an adventure

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