

# Hating myself through the Wind River Range

14-16 SEPTEMBER 2019

3:54AM – 7:29AM

ABSTRACT. I wrote this shortly after this excursion; it served my emotional recovery as a venue for honesty and exploration of my narcissistic self-hate, which is perhaps my strongest fuel for endurance ambitions. It's long, redundant, and hardly intended to be interesting.

I hope sharing this lays some imagination for, or intrigue in, embarking on such excursions with an intention of feeling and exploring (in many senses), as opposed to being single-mindedly focused on speed and other SI-measurable parameters.

Manufactured urgency is stinging my nose. I'm tracing back and forth along the bank of a 10' wide creek. Cool water's splashing – I'm thirsty again as I write this. Ignorant to the nuanced complexities of the gentle life growing around me at this thin interface between earth and sky, I stomp the bank, searching for where to cross. Reluctantly, I settle on a wet log: long, barkless, dead. Feet hooking pigeon-toed, I crawl across it. "Necessity" (I narrate to myself) presses my body into a shrub overhanging the log; it presses back. I make an assertive move into the rustly conglomerate; one of its branches flip my glasses from an open pocket. I reach to find the precious tool in the black water, and I slip into the creek with muscled slowness: right shoulder first. I'm wet, all right; glasses are gone. I stand in the water for a moment – proceed or recede? – and decide to go back.

That's 2 minutes into the effort. With this track-record, I elect to dry off and not bring my expensive camera, also stationed in an open pocket. I sneak back into the car. I can hear Ana's already gone back to sleep; Sequoia, the dog, looks at me eagerly as she buzzes her tail and puts her nose down in prep for receiving my familiar attention. I calm down a few notches. I embark again, with renewed intentions.

**1 hour.** I'm at home under the stars with nobody to judge me. I can smell my childhood: a sensation exquisitely private. I know you know it too.

**2 hours.** This pack is bothering me: it lifts my shirt in 60 seconds; I can't reach a damn thing without taking it off, and my poles don't fit into it anywhere. Maybe it's too tiny: 5.5lbs, 8L. I fumble my inert generic belongings in the darkness as I leave Glacier Trail onto a black lichen boulder field. I begin eating something for the first time, with my poles tick-tacking as they dangle from their straps. What an unappealing noise: cheap, unnatural – like the screeching of BART.

I appreciate the lichen, we have a long relationship: low-elevation granite boulder fields host the independent entity, usually in windy spots where dirt hasn't accumulated to fill and cover; the desert hosts it too, the blatant colorful skin. I'm remembering watching a crappy movie as a kid; one of the characters, on a foreign planet, speaks "I see no signs of life": the scene was in a rocky desert, and I saw lichen flourishing the background. I

internally recite the poem of Freddy fungus and Alice algae, but I'm taken out of my head: Gah! My noisy poles keep interrupting me, catching on rocks – this is so awkward.

I'm finally done eating. A mitten is gone ... ! I pause – windy stars – in disbelief. My feeble light glares back unto a sleeping crowd of boulders. Through the beam emanating from between my eyes zips a moth; it's slightly larger than the bits of sparkling snow blown from what I can tell will be a post-hole extravaganza up top. I make a plan: I'll give myself 10 minutes to search for the mitten, then I'll decide to bail or proceed with a make-shift one, somehow. So I pace about the boulders – my memory of where, exactly, I had traveled is opaqued by equipment and food. At 8 minutes, I find the mitten (!), and tangle it over my numbing fingers.

I commence my favorite improv-dance across boulders. I'm navigating by memory in lieu of succumbing more attention to maps and zippers. Aye! I find myself at a false summit: an unnecessary vertical scramble. By now, light is settling on the landscape. I'd hoped to be at Downs Mountain by sunrise. A week of little sleep – packing in work while Edward Pultar visited – followed by a late arrival to Trail Lakes after work, compelled me to sleep a couple hours longer before embarking. I pause toward the East: the landscape out there looks welcoming, ancient. I should have brought the camera.

500' later, snow packs between the boulders and atop their noses and heads. My favorite dance isn't working: I slip and crack my right hip, exploding a gel and tearing one of my shots' few pockets. A couple minutes later, the dance puts me in a position where my right shin is bearing my body's weight like a lever. 30 minutes later, I keep punching through the snow drift – heart in my neck – and I tweak my right knee. I commit, finally, to never taking a dynamic step onto snow. I try to rip open a gel with my teeth and mittened hand, and watch the snowscape blow about. Winter is blooming. I knew the two recent storms brought snow; this is much more than I figured.

What an awful start. I love it though, I really do. I know these matters don't matter; they won't stop me. Extraordinary, must be the circumstances for me to bail. This is a main advantage of traveling alone: this and traveling at my own pace, and not being distracted by sociable navigation. Much of my interest in endurance efforts has been fueled by wanting to feel something – anything – that subverts my control. Each season I've carried a degree of fitness such that I might, at last, summon the courage for my will to fail before my fitness – an experience that seems to be unattainable if stakes are too low such as in casual excursions; an experience that's always been averted by a finish line, a competitor who backs off, or full-body cramping, when the stakes are higher. I'm glad for this running community – supportive yet critical – cultivating virtuosity in some, and a dream for that in others. Or maybe I've got it wrong: I'm glad, I suppose, for this running market:

for the champions it puts forward, however their manicured characterization; for the equipment it tells the rest of us to purchase – it's such excellent equipment – in order to attain happiness and respect from our peers; for the tools it supplies for measuring ourselves and our peers.

Whatever the forces, beautiful, is consensus on a common measurable goal, such as what can take place in competition: each competitor trying her hardest toward that goal, each competitor made better by each other's consented effort. I doubt there are other such social environment that generates virtuosity?

But races are so controlled. The experiences in-route are so predictable. The imagination and requisite skills supporting and generated by them are so specific. While I've found myself treasuring sanctioned competitions for anchoring a season of excursions and imagination, they do not fulfill my truer recreational interests: finding boundaries of will, concentration, resourcefulness, navigation, in an autonomous complex environment, and dancing on boulders.

**4 hours.** Dully, I pass a gray pond collecting melt of Sourdough Glacier. Yep, it's a stark scene; I know I'm supposed to find it beautiful. I'm laden with propaganda instructing me what to like; it's infected my bones and mind – I can hardly say my taste is my own or is original. I pretend I'm escaping my infected people and cleansing myself of this propaganda-disease, but I know I'm only amplifying my contagion by sharing this story. My gaze returns to my feet; I let the bright snow scorch my eyes.

A thin layer of water spreads across a great pitched rock. My hand clutches snow against this rock, and water pools deep enough for my straw to purchase suction. Gradually, my thirst is quenched and my patience is depleted.

I can tell I'm on a glacier now, though the new snow obscures its details. Still committed to never a dynamic step on snow, I'm pouncing atop bits of boulder crowns on what I'm sure is moraine. I'm reminded of that film starring Kevin Bacon from the 80's. I missed its beginning while playing with battle beasts as David H.'s brother ostensibly watched after us; when I tuned in a small group of people was dashing atop rocks between sand in a desert, afraid a giant worm would get'em. My mind sticks in my childhood as I posthole and pole-vault through wind-sculpted crossbedded snow.

I sense the ice is pitching, so I slow way down searching for crevasses with my whippetted poles. I recall Skurka's annotation, "small cracks". I find a spot where my poles feel no bottom. I contour, methodologically, to the South for some cliffs. I'm starting to see a 8' wide crevasse. I climb onto the wet cliff, slip, and catch myself with frightened muscles from falling 3 inconsequential inches – ice always makes me anxious; I'm a foreigner who doesn't know the laws. My mitten is strangely wet: catching that silly fall broke my thumb nail: it's now bleeding. My teeth tear a piece of buff and wrap my thumb so my mitten doesn't moisten and freeze. From this cliff, I can see more crevasses. I elect to take the longer, safer, route, and retrace my steps and cross and exit the ice, boringly methodologically.

**5 hours.** I find some running water, at last. Sans glasses, the reflecting snow erodes the usefulness of my eyes. I forgot sunscreen and chap stick. I fill and drink my water vessel 4 times over, as I arrange the buff to cover my face, and tear little slits around my eyes with a knife.

This place is unearthly: nothing is horizontal, nothing is alive, I am a blister and everything is frozen. Newly frozen moths litter the snow's surface. I have no sympathy for them – I'm wondering why.

**6 hours.** More water. At the toe of Dinwoody Glacier, I sit down for the first time. I like the name; it's easy for me to remember: there are too many Grasshopper Glaciers, each with its false myth. I'm in the Himalayas. Turbulent wind is wafting sounds of splashing water to me, incompatible with what I'm seeing. I squint up at the towering cliffs and castles, as if I'm about to ask for something that will surely be rejected. This place doesn't make sense to me: it's been created by forces of a different scale than my mind's been trained to model. Water is pooling where it shouldn't, the ridges don't witness watershed boundaries. I deliberately embrace this koan, and try to feel something new. But, if I'm honest, my inner self-hating narrative is still the strongest voice:

I'm a moderately attractive white dude who is loved by people I respect: what doors aren't open to me? My privilege is profound: my interests happen (/have been groomed) to be generally in-line with what larger institutions want of me. My accomplishments are hardly my own. My principled life is afforded by immeasurable unseen privileges, which are sustained by enabling suffering exactly antithetical to my principles:

3 people are enslaved to sustain my practices, not to mention the suffering I'm causing to yet-born people, not to mention the unique modes of living and interactions that are being made obsolete by global market forces to which I contribute with each annual deposit into my IRA. My livelihood is framed and defined by a nation that stole its lands and resources through genocide, acquired half the wealth of the globe through kidnap and slavery, and now holds a nuclear gun to the heads of 1/3 of the globe, oppresses 1/3 of the globe, and subjugates 1/3 of the globe to operate as its client nations. Oh, and the swaths of excellent animals, and entire imperceptible heritage within, that are quietly suffering into oblivion.<sup>1</sup> Finally, I am, by this very excursion, contributing to the trivialization of this great Wild place: flattening Wildness into pure nostalgia and a single parameter: time.

My life is so otherwise pleasant, I seek controlled contrived challenges, which I'll later spend to fuel my inner narcissism disguised as passion or generosity or some other quality of character that my community upholds. I already have everything: why not oppress others by obscenely demonstrating the disparity between me and them?

My blistering face is now shivering from a stomach of glacial water.

**7 hours.** To the SouthWest, I see two signs of wetslides.

I'd considered going into Titcomb basin. My step-dad, Mike McMahan, has spoken so highly of it ever since I was a kid. To him, this place defined his imagination of what outdoorsmanship could offer. Mike lived in Lander in his 20's, where he met his best friend, Herb, who's since somehow served as Mike's

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<sup>1</sup>I'm not even mentioning, for I don't have the courage to do so, the direct, deliberate, actions I do to create suffering in my immediate vicinity.

guardian angel. I've heard a few times of the storm that caught them near Indian Pass. Wind tattered their tent, as they stayed awake all night in it holding its corners down and eating cinnamon gummy bears. Herb later wrote a "thank you" letter to the tent's maker; Mike to the gummy bear company. An old photo, from the 70's depicts Mike resting his head on his ice ax, exhausted at Indian Pass with a 3-story-high frame pack that he's used his whole life. Speaking with Mike about the Winds casts this place as huge, revered, transformative, vast in its geology, topography, and ecology, and embedded with nuance and specifics that reductionism is not designed address. Here I now stand, with a bikini of a pack, crossing the entire range in a single effort, because I cannot spare time from the important work and community I'm involved with. I'm greedy; I've declared how to best experience the Winds, and I will do that, then move on. I'm embarrassed at myself, and the ethics I grew up with; I'm embarrassed at Mike, for Mike. I know he's watching the 10-minute pings of my GPS unit, following along with love and enthusiasm and full concern.

Because of the wetslides and overwhelming snow, I elect to forgo Titcomb basin, and will be glad to return for a more thorough stay another time.

I embark straight South, up a fantastic couloir. I close my eyes for 20 steps at a time: walking meditation, counting each right step. On the count of 10, I open my eyes to adjust course. To my right, I spot a vertical crevasse, which I've never before seen. The dyrite-cliffs show a larger, emergent, pattern of color swirling about. I can feel my mind trying to understand it, trying to understand what is so mesmerizing, trying to understand anything, essentially always through reductionism – a perpetual habit. I'm tantalized by this foreign world, as my eyes burn. Memory tells me this is among the tougher climbs of this day, so I supply an effort commensurate with endurance races: 20 steps, glance, 20 steps, glance, etc. Whippet out, I navigate some slicker snow-ice. Eventually, I reach the apex of the couloir, and avoid what I'm sure is a giant cornice. The view is overwhelming. My central position is purely sky, snow-ice, and granite; it's chaotic to my comprehending mind. To the South, where I'm heading, are 3 peak-systems, each covered in snow; to my North, where I came from, is similar, but closer. I convince myself I spot Wind River Peak, as the farthest prominence in the distant horizon.<sup>2</sup> Similar to how I'm continually aware of the most recent shelter, I'm aware that this is the strongest experience of the outing so far: I intend to tell somebody about it. I situate to safely look down the steep couloir of the South side, where I intend to go. I behold a gigantic bergschrund from East cliff to West cliff. My memorized route is impassible. My stomach sinks. In my precarious spot, I consult maps. I'm off route – this entire steep couloir is off route. I had memorized, scrutinized, the route so I wouldn't have to consult maps; I had meditated on the experience of traveling each corridor, each pass, each summit. Evidently, my memorization was off. My weakness is now proportional to the might I summoned up the couloir. I eat something, which takes a while to generate adequate saliva for swallowing, and make note of this conflicted moment. I descend quickly.

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<sup>2</sup>Some part of me is aware that this effort is not realistic, but that acknowledgement hardly surfaces.

This is the last time I'm fully coherent. Now commences an ongoing state of fatigue, faulted memory, and flailing consciousness.

**9 hours.** I'm a child being escorted by her father from the toy store. I'm a teenager being picked up early from a party where my crush will stay. My heart reaches Westward, into the higher land, while I pout up then down Blaurock Pass. The plants bother me, I was perfectly happy without them. Skurka annotates "sound of music" across a gigantic mud flat: I don't need pleasantries. I glance back and reluctantly appreciate what I'm seeing, but it only causes me to want to be there. I consider exploring Helen Glacier, to continue the route I had envisioned, but trust that the massive bergschrund promises more such impossibilities. I grieve the loss of the route I had imagined; I wish, now, I went to Titcomb Basin.

**11 hours.** "Mheeeae" – punctuates my awareness, and reminds me I'm not alone. It is the pika's heritage: one expression which, to them, embodies all they have come to be. In it is their seasonal habits, their mating desires and anxieties, their favorite foods and times of day and techniques for predicting changing weather, an amazing understanding of their world that has been transmitted over the ages via genes and instruction. It surfs on individuals, and transcends each. They scream it, so. They scream it to any ongoers; they embed it with every nuance of their species they can encode in a single breath – a final synthesis of their entire being. Soon their mountain islands will be submerged, and they will be gone. They know this.

To me, their intonation is exactly neutral, ambivalent. I love them for it, because I love being noticed – I consume the gentle chirp, and spend it immediately: a transaction for gained confidence. I am adept at appropriation.

**13 hours.** The sun is low, the environment around me is so gentle and inviting. I spot a Marten in the cliffy tight trees.

**15 hours.** The sun is setting as I dance on flattened granite rocks hovering on black black water. I'm away from plants again, and this immature creature's tantrum is appeased. I'm on snow again, and I drink the sounds of the water under my feet. The pink sky lifts the gray snow. I, too, am lifted. I envision Mike on Indian Pass now, as we're both looking down on Knifepoint Glacier: I'm jealous of his vantage.

**16 hours.** Alpine Pass toggles darkness.

**17 hours.** My lights are stuck on bright-mode. I believe I have enough battery-life nonetheless; I'll check it out later. In the meantime, the rocks are so amazing. RockyRoad ice cream: black blacker than charcoal, mixed in blocks with milky white. The sparkles are dazzling. The surfaces I'm looking at feel fresh. I imagine the chemical turmoil of their creation: as it's cooling, domains stabilize and in doing so release heat, which remelts'em. This equilibrium descends to a threshold, where the chemical dynamics shift: some domains survive, and they float in their lower-density crystalline phase, allowing a cooling that freezes'em to where they are. The color-textures around me are infinite: it could never be painted, only recreated by natural processes as profound as the creation of the Earth. These color-textures are concept-emotions, in objective

form. They are a manifestation of some of the most interesting ones. The pink hue speckled by black bits on white with a growth of green venere on parallel faces is some specific features the geometric Langlands program. Investigating the pink will reveal it's 2-dimensional algebraic structure; investigating the green therefrom will reveal the dimensional reduction from 3-dimensions. Another surface reveals a couple group-rings and some unspoken tensions among my housemates.

This synesthesia dominates my environment as I concentrate and coordinate for rock hopping among hardly settled rocks. It's an addictive video game that I'm acquainted with; I could play it through the night.

**18 hours.** My groove is halted by cliffs against Alpine Lake: my body stops while my spirit continues and is gone, leaving behind a nauseous fatigued heavy self. My lights are too afraid of falling in the dark to even try to bend around the corner. Skurka reports "sneak" below the cliffs: I see no such sneak. I consider: while descending and searching for a sneak could risk having to ascend again, if it goes I'd save unforeseen effort. So I descend. I'm not finding any such sneak: my lights, nor the moon, is helpful. I consider any creative solutions: clap and listen for reflected sound to reveal the shape of a sneak? Throw my eyeballs? Extract my soul and proceed without my encumbering body? I begin ascending. But it becomes seemingly endless, and snowy rockslide hazard is becoming a reality. I doubt my confidence in the "no sneak" conclusion, so descend to try again. That was stupid: I see nothing new. I'm not thinking clearly. I wait for the moon to help me out. But I'm too impatient, and start to fall asleep leaning on my poles. So I ascend again. These ascents are becoming slower and slower: each step requires innovation in the Joy Market that cannot be repeated for it is consumed immediately. Looking up deprives my brain of blood, and my heart fills my head in full effort just for continuity of my vision. So I glare down, and resign to obviously inefficient foot-placements. I ascend real high, and finally discover a route over the cliffs, with the help of the quiet little moon.

**20 hours.** Moonlight pretends to fill the landscape: metallic tendencies, commensurate with the overtones, filtered through distance, of rutting elk in the valley below. Golden lake is golden, when depleted of light, sound, and activity. Magazines, and other branding that leverages our desire for happiness and safety, infiltrate my imagination of what the place might be like at other times: I'm imagining a youthful white couple. The guy grew up in Salt Lake City and visited the Winds once before as a Freshman in college, the gal moved to SLC from the midWest, searching for something specific which nobody's ever asked her to explain. He's leveraging his hiking experience and the value of the outdoorsy brand he's accidentally inherited yet has no intention of adjusting; she's leveraging her independent attractiveness and potential to be transformed. Both fantasize that this is their last summer before settling down – so they fantasize as they interact with their REI stock gear, and stow their journals of filtered truths, and books whose existence reveals their domination yet not a sentence therein speaks of such.

I'm imagining a middle-aged man fly fishing in the still water. I'm imagining a marmot watching the man, hardly able to focus on him: the fisherman doesn't easily fit into

the internal language the beast evolved to actionably interpret. I'm familiar with the marmot's behavior, I encounter it often in front of a class. I stop imagining: I get tired of myself, as I'm sure you are already. The moonlit lakescene is now behind me: I watch it in peace for 20 seconds, expecting a moment of silence – the spaceless type so saturating that all things are simultaneously so near they block sound and so far they're inaudible. To the contrary, a polyphony of rustling creeks trickle the boulder conglomerate.

**21 hours.** More cliffs against a lake. I like that combination; it's rare, though not unreasonable to expect. This time I don't try for a sneak. I'm finding myself gaining higher and higher. My memory now isn't trustworthy: everything looks new, while everything looks familiar, as if from childhood as well as from excursions last month. I'm climbing too high; I'm sure I missed a route down. Stupidly, I decide to descend. I'm at the meeting of the horizontal water and the vertical rock. I consider swimming.

I become one of those creatures shown, in passing, in the modern Mad Max film, the ones on all-fours stilts. I'm using my poles out in front of me, as my feet shuffle the tiny ledge 2 inches below the water's surface. My poles are quivering with pretense to buckle; my core is flexing in strange ways to remain stable. I pause to choreograph: should I fall, I'll hold my pack above my head to spare my batteries and my sleeping bag. My core muscles are giving me warning signs of failing, so I hustle through. I achieved a sneak.

**22 hours.** A grumpy porcupine ejects itself from a shrub in the darkness – it seems to be shuffling in an old drawer, looking for something trivial (a rubber band, a thimble, a photo of its nephew, scissors?). I instinctively block my face with my arms and poles, then chuckle that my instincts are responding to the myth that porcupines shoot quills. Its quills are flayed, and its scowling at me. I watch the beast for some moments, as it kinks its neck to peer back through its fortification, then I let it be.

I see a strange shape in the artificial lighting. It's an old degrading balloon. That makes about 50 of these that I've found while very remote. I realize it's the first recent sign of human activity I've seen on my trip: not a footprint, not a voice, not a distant tent (well, a few airplanes, I suppose). I put it in my trash: my back left shorts pocket.

The 'trail' I was expecting is hardly that. It's intermittent. I'm losing it often, and commit to just moving forward instead of hunting around for it each time it seems to disappear.

I'm making bad decisions. My balance is shifting as my headlamp rotates its perspective. I'll sleep now.

I consolidate the trash, and neatly pack it into a single bar wrapper. I extract the sleeping bag Mike Wolfe is loaning me, extract my bear spray, and hang the bag and trash elsewhere. I set an alarm for 2 hours from now.



**25 hours.** I wake up shivering. Maybe I should just get moving. My watch reports that I've slept for 3 hours. I now remember that my watch's noises no longer work. I'm traveling 5 minutes later.

**26 hours.** Sunlight spreads from the horizon fast. I wish I was farther by now, I slept too long, I'm only staring at my feet – I am disappointed in myself.

I'm pushing elk into the alpine – I can tell from their fresh scat and hoof prints in the tundra-ice. Normally, I feel guilt in doing such; this time I tell myself I shouldn't feel guilt: their predators have been annexed, poisoned, or slaughtered by my people; they should be thankful to me. Sure, they're now starving from demanding more from the short season than it supplies, but I dismiss that suffering. I am adept at justifying oppression and dominance per priorities private to me and under my control – isn't our capacity to construe narrative evolved exactly to manage the inconsistencies inherent in being the social while genetically independent creatures we are?

I see one elk, now three, on a white quartzite granite slab with earthen grasses under their hooves. The scene is picturesque: a giant rack and two cow elk pinked with rising light; a backdrop of white granite just below the horizon; just above it is a setting full moon. The bull watches me saunter by, as the cows take cover.

**28 hours.** Skurka writes “yehaw” in describing this aesthetic ridge off Europe Peak. It is really a wonder: well-sized for the human body; it's a playful scramble. I'm pushing bighorn along the knife ridge. They begin mixing with the elk in the pass below. Bugling, and barking, ensue, leaving ample space between each utterance. I can see steam coming from the elk faces. The heard is divided by the bighorn's presence and retreat to lower grounds; the bighorn panic forward, to the nearest sanctuary of high ground.

**29 hours.** This hillside forest must have burned a decade ago. The figures still standing are bald and white: great bone epitaphs. The openness has lent to flourishing shrubs: huckleberries abound. I keep pausing to quickly fumble-pluck berries from their stem and burst those explosive moist flavors in my mouth. I lose myself for just a moment with each berry: my vision goes opaque, as my sensations are directed fully to mouth. I swear, the berries are better than they have to be. I reflect on how they came to be – a narrative that I knowingly manufacture through my model of natural selection and survival of the fittest. Great beasts and birds pressured the berry's existence; they sculpted out of flavor space, subject to chemical constraints, the berry I taste now – a delightful gradient-flow. I imagine also the berry's sensation of being plucked; might there be something fulfilling about that? A relationship of mutual dependence can be so specifically felt and developed. The existence, and chemical articulation, of these berries are a delicious and direct measurement of a time-scale too large to comprehend. From emptiness can grow desire.

This sculpting has now ended: its crumbling has already commenced. The berries are ancient ruins I consume as a tourist. The beasts of its creation are suffering or demolished, the bird's migration patterns no longer coincide with the berry's bloom. The berries I eat now are slightly overripe and excessively abundant. They will fall on the

ground, and contribute to the overcrowding shrub mass. Excepting luck or genetic innovation, the new berry generation will be oppressed and outcompeted by this berrys' social infrastructure. The huckleberry civilization is now governed by those individuals with deepest roots: wealth inheritance that keeps the group static, for its eventual ruin.

Obviously, I'm thinking of myself here. I, too, am better than I have to be: my civilization has cultivated my tenacity and will, and critical thought and nuanced emotion, to a degree that is hardly essential for my well-being let alone survival. We are overripe. I happen to be one with roots, though certainly not among the deepest – I probably wouldn't be vying for something so hard were that the case. In my constant forward movement and navigation, I rejoice in the physicality and exacting thought that inhabits me. I am a culmination of history, like many of us. I am the pika's chirp. And now, as I dial my effort high, I am screaming as hard as I can, and nobody knows how to receive it, especially myself. In this disparity between immense experience and limited communication and attention from others, I revisit a fundamental loneliness, which I'm sure we all deeply feel unless ignorant. A loneliness which has been given to me by my ancestors and evolution: an inherent suffering that supplies a gradient toward maintaining the challenging social transactions out of which blindly emerge a power that is changing this world, and is out of control.

**30 hours.** Elk hustle away as I follow their dirty paths through a weak forest. The sun, now, is hot; around me are granite faces and jagged horizons that I no longer have the concentration to comprehend. I am a baby elephant, following her mother's tail: I follow the inefficient path of the elk. I follow the bugles that separate into trills and overtones as they resonate. I follow their imagined intentions, and they take me to new places of imagination: of living with fear, and insisting on togetherness, and relishing exquisite alpha-male power before it's quickly dispensed.

I gain some control of my navigation, and elect to travel in large marshy grass – it's opener there, in the wide open air. I'm gradually approaching a huge scree pitch I intend to ascend. As I go to its base, an old dispensed bull elk sits alone in the sun. It trills at me over and over again, into the cool air. Its dialect is different from those in the North. Each 60 seconds, it hollers at me. It wants me to react, I know; it wants to feel powerful just one last time before the winter takes him. I don't even give him that; I'm too protective of my efforts right now, actually just my ego: I'm adept at undetectably targeting and defending against men who try to assert their influence over me, though I've wished I was better. As I ascend, the elk keeps hollering at me.

The skyline is stunning. I can't look, for I know I'll try to understand it, and I cannot spare that effort. Right now, I'm swimming through this place: I'll try to understand it another time.

**31 hours.** I feel strangely brisk as I float to Photo Pass. I see, up there, a human. She's about to take a photo, and I'm in its view. She removes her face from her camera in a warm surprise. She and her son, Tom, reached the pass from the South. They're camped in the basin to the East; they're exploring if it's possible to scramble over a pass back

to their camp. They know the area well. We all poke fun at my silly intentions. They are such warm people, I'm glad the first people I see are they. Per my request, they enthusiastically take a photo of me, which they'll email to me after their return. That'll be the only photo of me out here, at Photo Pass.

I fly Southward; skimming across the small boulders and tufts of grass. I'm rejoicing in my humanness. Unlike huckleberries, I get to taste myself.

**32 hours.** Pronghorn Peak draws my attention like that ball I once saw a kid throw in the air from the corner of my eye, that ball which never came back to the ground – something about the peak is incongruent with the natural world. So innocently is my model for this physical world challenged. I know the empty granite is uninhabited by intrinsic meaning; my fascination with it is a fascination with something in myself, perhaps a fascination with conflicting models of my reality.

But still, the peak looks terrifyingly familiar. Is it the moraine at its base that makes no sense per watershed examination? I've been here before? Maybe I have? I can feel my mind bend memories from nearby basins to make it true. Have I seen it in a photo somewhere? Maybe it's that I've been flying toward it for a while. Dejavu?

**33 hours.** The memorization of my route falters again: I'm about to drop into then immediately out of the Bonneville watershed, where I'll reconnect with my memory. I dance across the boulders, each worth closer inspection in its intricate frozen chemistry: a frozen game of go, in the middle game: a balance of history of tension: each feature's history in response to another.

**35 hours.** Fields of boulders concentrate my attention. My head remains down to keep blood in it.

I fly again. Marmots chirp, and scatter.

The cliffs to my West harbor gigantic intrusions of writhing gray-variations. I fit it to sandstone features, though I'm aware these are formed very differently.

These cliffs are strangely familiar. I can feel my mind inventing a past to explain the sensation of familiarity. I note that I should not trust my memory wholly: perhaps for instincts, but not for facts.

**36 hours.** For the first time on this route, I gain a maintained trail. Running immediately toggles into bore. I set into endurance running mode to compartmentalize discomfort and find feathers of joy before I flatten and fray them into the dirt. I'm out of the high country, which feels needless. I suspect a parallel route, through Baptiste basin, could be viable, and so much more aesthetic.

I encounter a group of 4 young men as I inspect a map at a trail junction. They recognize I've been running, and ask how far I'm going. "About 100 miles". The tone of their reaction reveals to me that they think I'm lying, or trying to out-do them. Somehow, it

feels like we're about to fight, so I leave the testosterone scene. It makes sense to me, I consider, that they made my excursion about them – I do that too.

I encounter another couple as I consult a map. I recognize them from Fisher Brewing, I think. The guy does a double-take. “Wow, you got a quilt and everything in there?” “Yeah”. “Look at that”, he rhetorically instructs to his partner, “I thought I had my fastpack gear down, but look at that. Now *I'm* the fat guy.”

I ascend New York Pass efficiently.

**38 hours.** The first time I was in the Cirque, with Renzo, we watched ice fall off granite faces as sun struck them. It was June; fresh snow was to our thighs; we were wearing shorts. On the way back toward Big Sandy lake, we came across a man struggling waist-deep in snow atop a boulder field. We shared that evening together around a fire looking over Big Sandy's shore. In the otherwise aloneness, Renzo and the man complained adamantly about George Bush; I gazed around, entirely uninterested in the conversation, but gently enticed by the cold granite summits.

**39 hours.** Even lighting, all in shade by now, gray rocks with infinite chaotic texture, and bold green mosses. Stunted trees stand along the trail. I hear a sharp, juttied, crack of a tree. I stop, listen, whip out my bear spray, release its safety. My imagination scrolls through what beast could make that sound: moose, elk, bear, cougar, wolverine. I peer around a boulder to see a man: denim jacket and pants, blue T-shirt, cap. His camping pal is lounging at their tent: “did you say 4 cups of water?”. “6 cups”. They don't see me, I walk a bit closer, I'm 8 feet away now. The man had been ripping down a tree. I consider what, if anything, to say. Other green tree parts are in a pile nearby. The denim man resumes cracking the tree apart. I don't like the man, because I don't like myself. Though don't imagine it'll go well, I speak “Look, here is a bunch of dead wood you could use instead. That wood there won't burn well; it's still alive.” The man, surprised of my presence, jumps, pauses, gathers my sentence while it's still in loft, and responds “No, it's not alive, it's dead.” I glance at the partly destroyed tree again, “No, it's alive.” “You're wrong!”. Pause, glance at the sideways tree, “It's still green”. “You're Wrong! ... FAGOT!”. Silence, trickling water, chipmunk chirp. “I see. Well, you tell yourself whatever you need to”. “This” he gestures at his holstered handgun “makes me right”.

The ‘Double think’ of the final scenes of Orwell's “1984” comes to mind, as does Donald Trump.

I'm struck marveling at the subjectivity of truth: when it's it a function of power, authority, and security?

We're leaning toward each other, without moving a toe. I'm now understanding how it could be that a dual might actually ensue between a handgun and a canister of bear spray. I think I have the advantage. I exit the most dangerous situation of my outing.

That's the 4th, and final, group of people I encounter.

**40 hours.** I take my time layering up in a dark forest, then move efficiently along a trail. I elect what Skurka annotates as the “less friendly” side of Black Joe Lake. I've been

along the “more friendly” side: it was a bushwhack. This trail peters out, I’m among some boulders at the shore of a lake.

**41 hours.** If I’m honest, I’m feeling nauseous. I should probably poo – I haven’t yet. Actually, I have to barf. I tug my attention out of my body, and focus on the boulder hopping. I love this, the rocks are fascinating: each its own universe; each a mirror of what I am, I could discover so much by inspecting’em. This is hardly “less friendly”. I think I would have said “less earth-like”, or maybe “more moon-like”. It makes sense to me that the earth is more friendly than the moon: it’s where we evolved to inhabit. Maybe we just don’t understand moon-creatures because we don’t communicate with’em, and that’s why we accuse them of being less friendly. What might a moon-creature look like? I stomp on a stickly-plant. I just crushed an earthling, and the thought of me being a traitor comes to mind. I invent the moonlings now: they’re trolls sleeping in the crevasses of the boulders. Being on the dark side of the moon, they are essentially blind. They’re so feeble, such thin bald skin, gray and almost transparent. As an earthling I’m so much stronger, quicker, full of vitality. The trolls are frightening for my imagination to hold. They’re a dangerous seed on which my imagination might grow something deeply terrifying. But I hold on nonetheless, until they become gentle and innocent.

... Oof, I almost barfed ...

I deliberately resume the Zelda game of boulder hopping on the moon among the moonlings. The compartmentalized nausea dissolves.

Okay, there’s a cliff obstructing my progress. I 4th class up a crack to its nose, and tread carefully along its rounded back through a thin layer of snow, ascending up high from the lake. I’m keen to notice subtle signs of human, or game, among the few shrubs that are clinging to, invading, this moonscape. I convince myself I see some such signs, and follow my fellow traitors as I traverse up high. I drop down, continue, ascend again, and drop down again.

My emotional state is delicate, I’m aware. I’m acutely sensitive to tiny bursts of joy among the nauseous fatigue and discomfort. I don’t trust my imagination from generating something terrifying. Each tiny 45-degree lee pitch at the top of a bed-sized boulder, this specific shape, is pleasing for me to step on – I think it is so because I’m familiar with that shape from my childhood or maybe some recent experience. Whatever the reason, I uphold it, and repeat it whenever I can. Each such circumstance releases a shade of color and joy. Soon enough, the trick fades away, so I desperately find another mode to access bits of joy. I continue in this way, holding on to 3 to 5 such modes in a given 10-minute period – I consume them, then insatiably hunt for another.

**43 hours.** Wind River Peak looms in my imagination – that’s where Loren hurt his foot last year coming down the unstable craggy pitches. The gigantic boulders leading to its base intimidate me; any semblance of dancing is replaced by a 3-points-of-contact-at-a-time, breathless, heave of my material body with my soul in tow. With my head down, and intending to avert the huge boulder field, I get way off track: I ascend way too high. I sit and rest in the darkness for a moment, and chew forever on a piece of food.

Oop, here is a lake. I don't remember this. I consult a map, and, yep, it's there, so I continue along its snowy shore. Wait, all I did was notice a lake on the map – who's to say that's where I am. I consult the GPS: yep, it's there. Wait, am I sure I should pass by the lake to the next waypoint? I'm trafficking in self-doubt and confusion. Maybe I should sleep here. I lay on my back, still chewing gradually. Cold files into my clothes; I realize my feet are numb from stomping through snow. How long have I been on snow? My body is arranged how it was for a moment near Golden Lake. I still have another day of travel – but, no, yesterday I still had a day to travel, now it is today, and I'm finished. I'm not finished, though I can't really tell where I am.

My light flickers into emergency-mode: very dim. I change batteries, but remember the other batteries had already done the same; again, the light flickers into emergency-mode. I roughly calculate: I have an extra light, with an extra battery. I know its batteries don't last long; I'm disappointed that I didn't adjust my lights out of the super-bright mode last night. I embrace the situation, and find optimism that the moon, eventually, can help me. I'm elbowing into a cognitive slot-canyon, where bright joy resides, though is quickly consumed. I like this challenge, I like that I don't know how it'll be possible to proceed.

To my surprise, I've apparently already begun the steep climb. I'm using my folded poles as ice-picks in the foot of windslab atop the rock faces. I know the climbing route is a bit tricky: two zig-zags: when shall I commence with each zig and each zag? I brush snow off my shoes, stabilize my torso, and relax. Suspended in darkness, I meditate on my memory from last summer's descent of this pitch. I relive the experience.

I'm seeing the color from that daylight. I'm remembering the trickles of wetness emerging over granite noses. I'm remembering teetering boulders, and the crags above. I'm there, I'm concerned about Loren again, I'm concerned about our slow progress from then; I'm concerned our route won't go through. The dry air is in my nose.

I resume the ascent. I flash my light into bright-mode before it immediately shuts back to emergency-mode: in this way, I snap-shot the crags above me. I match the image to memory, insert that into the mediative exercise, eyes closed. My ascent is a crawl, literally. I'm using my knees to stay on, instead of in, the snow. I flash the crags, meditate, and continue. And repeat.

Inadvertently, this peculiar cognitive exercise segues into a splintering of some essential architecture of my consciousness: my perception, though acknowledged, is not organizing in a familiar way. Memories are becoming identified with present, actionable, visions. I narrate this in my mind, and find some intrigue in it. But continue.

I'm now above the crags. I think my route was as direct, and efficient as possible. But wait, I'm not at the top. I thought I'd be at the top. Maybe I'm turned around.

Memories, and present-visions, are feeling equal to those normally unacknowledged imaginations of the forthcoming 10 feet, 50 feet, 1/4 mile. “Time” – the cognitive construction for organizing and prioritizing images – it seems, isn’t working very well. The nearly imperceptible effort tasked with organizing visions in time, and an actionable relationship to it, seems to be releasing. I narrate this to myself.

I pick down a large snow pitch. Actually, I’m picking up it. I don’t know if I’ve already attained the summit, or not. I consult the GPS unit. I struggle to grab its zipper as it hides it. As my neck strains to see the zipper, it cramps from the cold wind against it. As if I’m stunned by a spell, I promptly look upward to relieve the cramping.

Wow! The Stars!

My childhood friends, AJ and Mike, are also watching the stars. I smell juniper. I know this is a memory.

I’m wishing I looked at the stars more often. There is the North Star.

I feel my model of the solar system being referenced. Once referenced, however, it won’t get recatalogued and stored away; I don’t know where to put it back; it obstructs my vision. To put it away is to abandon the cognitive model altogether – a task which is impossible to do once embraced; said another way, to know this model is to see it in the center of my mind, no alternative seems possible.

I reflect on if those old Catholic paintings that lack ‘perspective’ is actually how people *saw* back then: now that ‘perspective’ is a useful model for organizing my vision, I cannot know how else to see.

It’s so hard to ask a well-posed question that I don’t know the answer to, yet could identify an answer to it.

The solar system model is too simple, too conceptual, too designed. It’s a clean polished pine wood table in an empty white room: isolated, all I see is purposeful design; it is an icon of control, it is the opposite of wildness. I despise myself for doing that to this world: making it designed and with purpose, and limited; controlling it.

I look down from the stars. The GPS is trying to distract me; it does not want to be interrupted. I turn it on, and it feeds on me – I know it needs me, as much as it complains, the grumpy baby. The device is incomprehensible. I pivot around, and get confused which direction I should be going. Oh! The stars! I look up, and trust what I see, and navigate by them. I’m not quite to the summit.

I pass the spot where I ate half-a-sandwich last summer with Loren. I’m lost in the superb mix of fat and sweetness-saturated toasted bread. The blackness around me takes on a purple hue. I’m descending, I’m nervous about that pitch where a party was cramponed up last year. I join them, and pick my way down with them, in reverse time. They were nervous, then, and I am nervous with them. The picking puts me back on the face I just ascended: these motions are too similar to know which face I’m on. My angle against the sky is overwhelming: I’m in the sky. The large flat sparkly cold surface which is the snow is becoming hard to distinguish from the large flat sparkly cold surface which is

the sky. I cannot balance; the wind is sabotaging orientation. I crawl down the face, punching through the snow every 3rd step. The way my body sags reveals that the snow is actually flat. So I stand, and narrate to myself this confusion. I'm soaring through space now: wind and equal sky-snow. Way down below, and right in my face, is a large frozen lake. It's obstructing my vision. Its existence is not consistent with my memorization of the route; I thought I'd see another lake. Now they're both there; these lakes are now on both sides of me, and are one-in-the-same. Both lakes are very far away, way down there. One is out of sight, at the base of a cliff I'm above. I realize I am not down there.

Too many images are compiling: too many lakes, too many cliffs. Memory is stacking, not leaving. Space, as a model for organizing and cataloguing images and other perceptions, is becoming inadequate – there's simply not enough room. The effort to maintain Space is spiking; this is an effort of denial. Succumbing to the overwhelming case against Space, I let a bit of that effort go, and it quickly flickered away in its obvious inadequacy and falseness.

The calm, now ensuing, is startling and stark. I indulge in this psychedelic state, narrating it in my mind with entire ambivalence. I search for more, with lessons from Zen as my roadmap, an outdated roadmap of a different time and place, flapping and tearing in the wind. I detect the persistent, though nearly imperceptible, bit of will tasked with holding together my identity – the narrative of myself as it's placed in this larger social landscape; the sensation of self-authoring my experiences. I experiment with releasing it too, in the spirit of saving effort. Objects and conceptions merge according to operationally: pure, unorganized, perception. Inanimate objects that played ongoing roles in my recent experience are acquiring character and personalities: my maps are like that archetype of a slender woman who, in college, never dated anybody and is now a CEO of some Wall Street company – totally independent, I cannot offer her anything; my poles are a redundant simple supportive gal – always on my same team, though our relationship is thin – we give each other high-fives as we pass on the sidewalks and in the hallways; my GPS unit is a grumpy fat kid who needs me but complains each time I interrupted him – he feeds on me, I milk it. The cold cold wind is a comical gimmick, like the shepherd's tone for injecting a sense of urgency – I laugh aloud, and the poles do the same after me. Emergent from the wind is the overtones of the elk's bugling. I turn up their volume. Its a metallic hue of mellow orange, with hints of brown-green – a watercolor over the otherwise black, gray, white moonlit visual array. It's now a strong woman's voice singing four long comfortable notes: C up to A down to D then D. The timbre of these notes, questionably human versus metallic, feeds me. They are the half-eaten bar in my pocket that I'd been meaning to eat for hours, which has occupied a small part of my attention all this time. We utter these sounds, experimenting for just the



right intervals. When I find'em, I sing them louder. I see the woman, she is in a tent – she is a tent – made of greasy wild black hair. It's disintegrating in the ferocious wind. Lips and wild black hair are singing those comforting four notes. I sing them with her. I am the woman, I'm feeling my lips from the inside.

The 2 feet of snow is still elementally so similar to the black sky; they are smashing space with me in-between. I become conformal; the wind is generated by my elbows, subject to harmonic flow. Cliffs and lakes and ice package as a conceptual unit, similar to the effect of branding. I rotate it to find nuanced veneers of joy and confidence at their marbled interfaces. Some such regions of interface are smooth, and hard to focus on; others are a turbulent conglomerate, opaque to my vision. A gnarled tree throws my balance off, insisting on "rightward". I avoid eye-contact with it, though I sneak peaks now and then hoping to discover the source of its unusual spell – like our relationship with the sun, which always travels in the same direction in the sky: a chirality of our world which no question with recognizable answer can address.

...

There is only myself. But even this is distributed across my sensations. Personality and character is attributed to features of my operational experience such that myself cannot be isolated among them.

It continues in this way for a long time – I'll spare you from more unreadable specifics. I follow hidden layers of joy: yellow, mostly transparent and only visible from specific angles that don't persist far before they bend into invisibility, interfaces between the spatially-organized amalgam of perceptions and sensations. The psychedelic delirium is entire: unorganized, pure, perceptions.

**46 hours.** I, or some version of I, conjure an unnatural type of will and focus to assemble all these parts into action: I have a body, I control it, I control it to take a step forward in a certain direction. With that insistence for action comes overwhelming desire to be comfortable. I am not comfortable.

**47 hours.** I find a trail, and reality becomes manageable, however uncomfortable. I buy some overpriced will in order to run. I'm knowingly the victim of extortion now; I know I will be blackmailed later. But I prioritize the present. I jostle forward as fast as my reflexes can compile. My poles, out in front, play the supportive role of catching me as I repeatedly trip in my dim dim light. This state is familiar enough from 100 mile race efforts – it can persist for as long as necessary.

**49 hours.** The sun is rising. My identity is returning, and with it my competence. I'm now running fast, very fast, past pissing and shitting cows through thinned forest. I yell "HYAH!", as Mr. Lewis taught me, to warn the unreactive cows to clear the trail. They can't even kink their heavy necks to see what I am before I'm past them.

**51 hours.** I hear Ana's voice hollering for Fiasco, the dog. Immediately, this triggers uncontrollable sobbing. I try to reach her but collapse in pathetic sobbing. She runs to embrace me as I cry so so hard. Fiasco presses her head into my thighs in concern. I don't know how to escape this state, or communicate what was happening. I'm not sad. I'm not happy. I'm not relieved. I don't know what I'm crying about. I rise and sprint the final mile or so; Fiasco sprints with me with dutiful concern. I collapse at the trailhead, and continue crying so so hard.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This excursion tours through land that was stolen, through violence and deception, by the United States Government from the Shoshone and Arapaho people. For that matter, the genesis of the present concept of *wilderness*<sup>3</sup>, which is arguably the atomic rationale behind most such excursions, is the propaganda campaign to settle the West in effort to affirm this right of ownership, and whence to commence extracting invaluable resource and cultivating invaluable product.

My Dad started running marathons when I was a kid. He wrote a story of his first, which my Mom and I read together. It was so hilarious that my Mom and I decided to run a marathon together with my Dad. For years, my Dad, and step-mom, Reneé, made a regular event of running together: in the form of marathons or long runs. In this way, running became a regular part of my life since I was 14 years-old. This relationship with running offered confidence and imagination for it to take me to new places, both literally and metaphysically; it lended a thorough exploration of Zion and surrounding vicinities: solo multi-day excursions with minimal gear and food, essentially entirely off trail.

Mike McMahan, my step-dad, spent a substantive portion of his life living in Lander and near the Wind River Range. His experiences in the area cultivated the interesting and resourceful person he is today, at least in part (from what I gather). Growing up with Mike, he shared stories of his experiences in the Winds, with his dear friend Herb Lepley. Mike, and Herb, set my imagination for what mountain outings could involve: packed with interesting nuance and challenging, yet manageable, experiences and bonding. Herb was the first person I'd heard of who ran long distances along remote trails.

Buzz Nanavati and TJ Anderson brought my attention to the idea of fast-packing the Winds in the Summer of 2016. I appreciate that they shared their intentions of this route with me.

In the Winter of 2018, Loren Davis invited me to “run” this route with him the coming Summer. Loren suggested being very ambitious in our intentions: a maximal single effort. In August of 2018, the 120-mile race (Fat Dog) in the Cascades was cancelled the day before its start due to Wild Fires. I ran a bunch of the course anyways, in the smoke, but remained disappointed that the fitness I had accrued wasn't going to be matched by a potent effort. So I reached out to Loren, and we decided to “run” the Wind River High Route Skurka sells. In late August 2018, we set off for a South-to-North traverse. Coming down Wind River Peak, Loren hurt his foot badly. We hobbled out at Big Sandy. I ran back, through the night, through the Cirque of the Towers back to our vehicle. I am so grateful for Loren's very interesting friendship, and for him setting some ambitious imagination of this route.

Early this Summer 2019, Fat Dog 120-miler was rerouted: the snow didn't melt in time to do the requisite trail work for the original route. The reroute didn't appeal to me, for it was mostly on trails I had run the previous year. So I withdrew my entry and opted to do several scramble-runs with my fitness instead. My partner, Ana Brown, rearranged her work schedule to accommodate this late-season attempt. Ana is a beacon of support for my recreational running throughout a season, and a lifetime. She did car logistics, and thoughtfully prepared foods for my exit.

I'm thankful for the annotated maps Andrew Skurka sells, which reflect thoughtfulness and joy.

Mike Wolfe let me borrow some of his very lightweight equipment, which was essential for my approach to this excursion. Originally, my intention was to do this outing together with him; the late-season date was set to accommodate his schedule. Mike had to bail last-minute, for personal reasons. I wouldn't have done this without our shared intention.

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<sup>3</sup>such as alluded to by the US Congress' 1964 'Wilderness Act', and defined through a genre of self-reflecting literature and pastoral imagery initiated in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and thriving to this day.