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# Backcountry Horsemen of California



SHASTA - TRINITY  
UNIT



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## 2007 SPRING-SUMMER-EARLY FALL REVIEW:

**The OTHER side of the coin:**

**The CCC 2007 Experiences As Told By Individual Crew Members:**

Those of us in the Shasta Trinity Unit see the young CCC crews only for short time periods, when delivering supplies. The crewmembers are always polite and assist us where they can. By the season's end, crewmembers that never have been around large animals such as horses and mules have overcome their hesitations. The young strong bodies help load/unload packs without missing a beat. The following are examples from just a few of these bright young people. These young citizens are a major part of OUR future. As you will see, their eloquence helped us make the determination that "selected quotes" from each was not a proper acknowledgement of their participation in protecting the backcountry we all treasure:

**Tim Kilbourn**

**Inyo (Humboldt, Big Basin, Shasta-Trinity) Backcountry Trail Crew 2007**

"What the hell am I doing here?" Collapsing onto a makeshift wooden table after a day spent hiking 20 miles and maintaining trail for 6 hours, this question flashed through my mind. Was it insanity that led me to abandon my friends, family, possessions and all those other comforts of home? Why did I seek to replace them with backbreaking labor, low pay, and less than ideal living conditions?

Well, all of those questions are easy to answer. As I sit here gazing out at pristine Grizzly Lake with only one other person around for who knows how many miles, it's not too difficult to reflect on the journey I've been on for the last four months.

I arrived at our first worksite on a hot late May afternoon. As an alternate, I had the challenge of joining a crew that already had spent a month bonding and learning the ropes. When I stepped out of that truck and hoisted my pack to my shoulder, I sure didn't know what I'd gotten myself into. The first week passed in a blur. It was a flurry of introductions both to my fellow crewmembers and the way of life.

I slowly started to adapt. I was making friends and learning how to do work I hadn't even known existed. I also faced adversity I was previously unexposed to. I'd never been in a situation where I had nowhere to run. If I was annoyed with someone or had a disagreement, the longest I could expect to avoid him or her was overnight. Living in such close proximity could be both a joy and an incredible burden.

Throughout the season things gradually shifted. We lost crew members due to various reasons. I grew closer to some and further from others. However, we were all held together by some incredible glue. In two short weeks when this is all said and done, I'm sure I'll never speak another word to some of my crewmates. Others, I hope to maintain friendships with for at least the foreseeable future. Regardless of how my relationship with each person will continue, everyone has taught me something. It's as if I've spent the last four months in a funhouse full of mirrors. Each crewmember showed me a reflection altered by their individual characteristics.

I can't say whether this program has been a life changing experience or not. I have no idea how I'll shift back into a more "civilized" lifestyle. I know that I look forward to that challenge confidently armed with the lessons I've learned. This program gave back to me no more than I put into it. If you choose to embark on this adventure it will be the same for you.

No words could have prepared me for this experience. All I can say is expect hard work and rich memories. Don't cheat yourself and you'll have no regrets.

**Steven Jerome**  
**Stanislaus Backcountry Trail Crew 2007**

What the Backcountry Meant to Me

What does the Backcountry Trails Program mean to me? I struggle for an answer to this question. I mean how can one formulate a proper explanation in regards to the rich experience of the Backcountry when presented with a broad inquiry of this sort? I fought for days attempting to articulate the significance of these last five months only to find that there was no simple way to explain it. Did the Backcountry Program transform me? I answer with a resounding yes – more than I ever could have imagined. In fact, the person I once was is hardly recognizable to me at this present moment. What within me was once a cynical indifference has now been replaced with an exuberant optimism and a relentless drive. What was once a life without aim has become one of clearly defined purpose. My experience has ignited an inextinguishable flame within my being; a powerful energy dwelling inside that has long lain dormant. Therefore, I can say with absolute certainty that I am indeed different because of this program, in that now my perception of this life and my position in it has drastically been altered for the better.

My story begins five months ago when I boarded the Amtrak train on a one-way ticket from Iowa to California. With a pack filled with what few possessions I did have, I set off into the unknown – far removed from all that I deemed secure and comfortable. I recall the anxiety I felt on that train ride, but more profound, I felt the rush of anticipation in knowing that a new chapter of my life was about to unfold. Looking out upon the passing countryside through my seat window, I became keenly aware that I was embarking on a journey that would define who I am. You see, prior to getting accepted to the Backcountry Trails Program I was a confused and troubled youth, struggling to find meaning and significance in the world. It seemed like every time I thought I had found some inkling of worldly truth – some definitive principle of reality – I would be surely let down upon discovering that my realization was false. I developed a nihilistic outlook in which eventually led to excessive drinking, dropping out of college, and a long list of other destructive behaviors. Of course, one can only sustain such a lifestyle for so long before hitting rock bottom. At perhaps my lowest point, I began to re-evaluate how I was living. After much contemplative introspection I decided that I was finished squandering my potential and that I must seek a challenge in which would test the very essence of my being in order to discover what I was truly made of. My search took me to the Backcountry Trails Program and I swiftly applied. Soon after I received notice that I had been accepted, and within several weeks, so began the experience I had hungered for.

Now the season is at its conclusion and I can only marvel at how amazingly life-changing it all has been. Throughout this season I have had moments of such violent clarity that my concept of what it means to be alive has drastically been redefined. This is how significant my summer has been. It is at those moments when I'm pushing my body through exhaustion and pain to reach the summit of a mountain peak that I achieve the sort of clarity that brings reality into focus. It is at these moments that I experience man's potential to tap into an unlimited source of energy and strength in which allows him to overcome any obstacle. What I discovered was the essence of human greatness; man's noblest ability – the ability to take action; to harness the motive power of life; to establish a goal and then proceed on to achieve it. Each obstacle I have overcome this season has added to a source of constructive energy that is always available at my disposal, and of which I am eager to apply in the world outside of the backcountry. By possessing it, I feel no worldly force is capable of stopping me from being the best man I can possibly be.

Inner strength is not all I discovered within the Backcountry. Above I spoke of moments when I experienced profound clarity in reference purely to human potential, but in other moments I caught glimpses of something far grander. For fleeting instances I was able to witness and understand the connection between all things in nature. Staring up at the vastness of a star-filled sky or gazing upon the tranquility of a glimmering mountain brook, I would lose my sense of self and become aware of my inseparability with the

natural world. It is at these instances that one becomes aware of his communion with the living reality. The feeling is utterly breathtaking. This understanding would have been nearly impossible for me amongst the hustle and bustle of city life, but within the Sierras all became clear. Life made sense.

I am forgetting perhaps the most critical component of what made my Backcountry season so special – my fellow crewmates. The season would have been far more difficult to endure if it was not for the diverse array of wonderful individuals I shared the Backcountry experience with. Never before have I felt such a strong sense of fellowship and love of community as I have felt here. The support and camaraderie of the crew offered me an image of how humans are supposed to co-exist. In these past five months I have forged unshakable friendships that shall endure a lifetime. Never will I forget the late night fireside chats, the frequent laughter and horseplay, or the words of encouragement offered to me. Never will I forget these faces.

The season is over, but I feel as if a new life has begun. A myriad of opportunities are within my grasp. I now have the tools for success at my disposal and I am eager to utilize them outside of the program. A bright pathway has opened before me and I am prepared to enter. I shall, hold fast to the knowledge I have obtained and to the wonderful memories I have collected. The Backcountry shall remain in my heart forever. Thank you to all those who made this possible.

**Sara Sarvis**  
**Stanislaus Backcountry Trail Crew 2007**

When I first learned that I was chosen for the 2007 Backcountry Season, I knew I was in for a big adventure. Feelings of joy, excitement, wonder and curiosity fell over me. At the same time I was scared to be leaving what I had known for all my life and venture into the mysterious unknown. I knew I had to work hard, live, eat, sleep and spend most of my waking life with total strangers, be able to cooperate with them and still manage to keep my sanity. Other than that, I had no idea exactly what I was getting myself into.

The Backcountry, as I soon learned, is not for sissies. As I drove into the Placer Center on April 15th I was met by my crew who at the time seemed just as peculiar and anxious as I was. I didn't know how or why I was going to finish the program, as I kissed my family goodbye and watched them drive away. All I knew was that I was there with my forty-pound pack and I was going to at least try. As the season kicked off to a start I thought a lot to myself, "How the heck am I going to last five months?" I was always one of the last hikers on all the hikes and I found myself struggling to stay positive. I was homesick, it was cold, it was wet, the work was harder than I had ever done before and the people at that time weren't necessarily comforting to me. But, after much debating with the negative voice inside my head, I decided to stick with the program for a little longer and see if things might change for the better.

After my first evaluation I started to change. I was told I had too much self-doubt, that my negativity was holding me back. My C-1 suggested that for one week I could no longer speak the words, "I can't". And that's what I did: for one week I only told myself "I can do it". If I had any doubt I put it aside and just did it. To my surprise that week turned into a month and that month turned into five months. My hiking got better, my attitude changed, I felt better about myself. And here I am with only one week left to go and I'm still standing.

My crew, my family, have become people I couldn't imagine not knowing. When times are tough we stick together, help each other out, we support each other, volunteer for each other, listen to each other. I could even go so far as to say, deep down putting aside petty differences and such, we love each other.

My Backcountry season has been that of challenges I've faced and have overcome, wonderful memories I will cherish for life and, most of all, personal growth. I've learned a lot about myself, my character, what my limits are or aren't and how to deal with my haunting negative thoughts. As an individual, I am stronger, can withstand criticism better, I have a higher tolerance for people, a higher physical stamina and most of all I have learned to stay positive even through the worst of times. By pushing through frustrating situations and finishing what I start no matter how much I hated it, I have learned that staying positive makes things easier and my positive actions influence others positively as well. For me, the season has been all about staying positive and becoming a stronger individual.

I feel like I've been an important part of something big, something worthwhile. I feel honored to have had this privilege to come to the mountains with 15 others chosen as the best of the best, to work and live and find out a bit more of the bigger picture. With my attitude change and experiences I have acquired here in the Backcountry, I will move forward in life with a more appreciative outlook for what I have. I will always remember this summer as the summer of change. From here, I have no idea where life will lead me but after completing the Backcountry season successfully I know I will conquer anything that comes my way.

**Mike Butler**  
**Stanislaus Backcountry Trail Crew 2007**

Backcountry Boyyyy!

Before joining the Backcountry Program I was attending college with several of my friends from high school, only an hour from home. I was majoring in Management and Finance at Providence College in Providence, Rhode Island. I chose to study business, with the notion that it was very practical and would lead me to a future of earning a lot of money. As my senior year progressed and I began interviewing for positions as account manager and loan salesman, my attitudes regarding my post-college plans began to change. Rather than working in a North-Eastern City surrounded by family and friends, I decided it would be beneficial to leave my comfort zone for once in my life.

The Backcountry appealed to me because I spent several summers working outdoors with my hands, and had loved them all. Also, I knew this would give me the opportunity to see an unfamiliar part of the country and to meet a new, diverse group of friends. My college life lacked diversity, and I thought that would be an integral part of my overall education and self-growth. Lastly, I looked to the backcountry as a chance to get in shape and learn about living outdoors and backpacking. When I signed on with the Stanislaus crew I soon realized that my expectations of the program were different than the actualities of the Backcountry.

As time went on in the Backcountry, I began learning things about myself, and community that I could never learn through 4 years at a university. The initial realizations I discovered were that living in a tent without the comforts of home was much easier and more fun than I had expected. I began to appreciate the sky at night, the sounds of the woods, and waking up with the sun every morning. The next lesson to smack me in the face was how difficult it was to make a community grow together and stay healthy. Our crew was working around the clock doing chores and being there for each other. Just to get us through the summer. All the while I was making great friends and strengthening my personal work ethics. Looking back on the program, I realize how much I've changed and discovered in a few short months.

Most importantly, in my opinion, are the great friends I've made out here. I've learned to get along with and appreciate all shapes and sizes of people through living and working with them. I've learned what each individual must contribute to a community to make it thrive. By taking personal accountability for things that need to get done, one person can really benefit the people around him. Before I came here, I thought I knew what hard work was, but the constant work done through this program has given me new insight into strengthening my own work ethic. I've set new standards for the challenges I take on in the future. I developed a self-confidence by experiencing change and unfamiliarity. Lastly, are the less significant lessons I've learned including simple camping and backpacking skills.

Through completing this program I've adopted an outlook, which involves taking on challenges that I'm not use to. In the future I'll be more likely to chase goals with more confidence. I'm more interested now in participating and working in jobs that appeal to me as exciting rather than jobs that will earn me money. I'm interested in more trail work, living in this environment, and more self-building programs.

In conclusion I will always value this program on a personal level. I will strive to take the lessons I've learned out here and spread them in the "real world". I feel as though I've learned more about life and myself in general. I'd encourage anybody to take on the challenges of the Backcountry and to gain insight into life's "bigger picture".

**Amanda Godwin**  
**Inyo (Humboldt, Big Basin, Shasta-Trinity) Backcountry Trail Crew 2007**

My journey to the Backcountry began long before I ever stepped foot into the California Wilderness. It started with a search; a search for adventure, hard work, and a challenge. For the past year I had been working as an exercise specialist at a physical therapy clinic in Florida. While I enjoy interacting with patients and playing a key role in their rehabilitation, at the same time I knew I was not being challenged to my full potential. I decided I was ready for a change, and so began my search for a new job.

My quest for the perfect summer job began in the month of February. I started by plugging the phrase "outdoor summer jobs" into a search engine on the Internet. Once I narrowed my interest down to a job involving conservation/trail work I started filling out applications to Conservation Corps across the country. Although I was most interested in the California Conservation Corps Backcountry Program, I wanted to keep my options open in case I wasn't chosen.

Long story short I was chosen, and on April 16, 2007 I was on my way to California. I arrived, after 12 hours of flying, in Arcata to be greeted by Peter Martinez, my supervisor. I was nervous and excited and tired all at the same time. Would I get along with the people on my crew? Would I fit in? Could I make it five and a half months without daily contact with my family? These were just a few thoughts running through my head.

It's five and a half months later now, and I'm sitting on the porch of my cabin at Debriefing. The past months have been without a doubt the greatest challenge and reward of my life. There were times when all I wanted was to give up and go home. There were times when I wanted to sleep in till 10:00am There were times when everyone around drove me half mad till I was ready to scream. But there were many more times when I laughed with my crew. Times when I looked at the work I had completed and felt proud at what I was able to accomplish. Times when I hiked eight miles easily and felt strong.

With time spent in the Backcountry come new found skills and strengths. Like how to live in congruity with the environment, how to start a fire at 3:30 in the morning, and how to make cowboy coffee. Some of the skills I learned I might never use again, while other things I have learned will help to guide me to success in future endeavors.

Out of all I have learned this season the most important is to always persevere; whether it is hiking to work, brushing the trail, or just the daily grind of camp life. If you never give up and always strive for your best, then you will be sure to succeed not only in the Backcountry but also in life. It has been a great season, and I know the memories will last a lifetime.