

RYAN BOZIS

1. Why did you sign up for the hike? How old were you?
I was having an existential crisis about my parents divorce and my life up to that time -- struggling through college, binge drinking on weekends, having a nervous breakdown. I started counseling and stumbled across the HikaNation ad in Backpacker magazine. Sounded great. I was 20 years old.
2. What is your favorite experience from the hike?
Dark Canyon, Utah, was a sojourn in paradise. I slept on top of a large rock at a canyon junction and awoke next morning to discover ancient petroglyphs carved in the rock face next to my bed. It gave me chills to think who might have camped there before. We scaled canyon walls, traversed narrow ledges, swam in pool after pool of crystal green water, made almost no miles, and shared the last of our food in a potluck supper in the cabin at the waterfall. As we settled down to sleep, moonlight shone through the open door. I watched mice run in and out over Scott in his sleeping bag on the porch. I whomped one with a sock, laughed out loud and woke Shelly. When the next mouse ran in she screamed and flipped over backwards in her sleeping bag. Next morning Janet made skillet bread for all of us with what we found in the cabin food bin.
3. Did you have a moment of enlightenment or “ah-ha moment” on the hike and if so, what was it?
I walked out of Silverton a day or two behind the rest of the group, because Monty had asked me to hike with some newcomers. As we climbed higher and higher toward the Continental Divide the altitude, weather and exertion convinced them to bail out. I think Phil caught up with me on the western slope of a long climb where we decided to camp for the night. Next morning I got up, packed fast in the freezing cold shadow of the mountain and set out on my own for a long, switchback climb to the ridge. As I crested the ridge I stepped out of the shadow into glorious light and an endless vista of peak after peak and range after range. A bald eagle circled overhead, so close I could see its feathers. I started to laugh and cry, dropped my pack and turned circles with my arms in the air, praising a God I didn't really know at the time.
4. What was your favorite state and why?
I expected Colorado to be great, but Utah was an absolutely awesome surprise.
5. What was your least favorite part of the hike?
Leaving it.
6. How did the hike change you?
I gained confidence, physical strength and well-being, self-reliance, self-awareness. I discovered how little I need to be comfortable and happy.
7. What do you tell people about your achievement now?
Depends on the person and the moment. Sometimes I tell a personal story. Sometimes I talk about the AHS plan to establish an East-West corridor of trails and how we helped create the America Discovery Trail.

8. What would you have changed about the hike?
I would have gotten more haircuts, packed decent town clothes in my box on the van, and I would have done the whole thing from start to finish.
9. Did you pursue other hiking/backpacking afterwards? Long journeys or short weekends?
I still love to backpack, hike and camp. Mostly I do weekend trips, but I've done longer trips in Smoky Mountain NP, Colorado, Utah, Missouri, Arkansas, Virginia and the Georgia section of the AT. I'd love to do a walking tour of Scotland.
10. What did you learn about yourself that you are willing to share?
Wherever I go my baggage goes with me, so I need to keep it light. Running away gets me nowhere. I have to run TO something or somewhere and choose carefully.
11. Did it make you a stronger person?
Definitely
12. Are you proud of your accomplishment?
I'm proud of what I did but disappointed I didn't do the whole thing.
13. What was the dumbest thing you did on the hike?
I told Tim Geoghegan his tent would be good for winter conditions, but really, who wants to hear his tent is crap?
14. What was your most vivid memory from the hike?
I think I've already shared that.
15. What was your funniest moment on the hike?
Cracking jokes with the group in an old house at the edge of a cattle ranch.
16. What was your most embarrassing moment on the hike?
Getting "lost," though I had actually gone a little ahead of the group. When I couldn't find the trail I decided to look for water and a place to camp down in the valley. That's where I found everybody.
17. What was your nickname on the hike?
"Flyin' Ryan"
18. Any other thoughts or stories you'd like to share?
Sure, but I'll never send this back if I start telling them all.