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For Immediate Release

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CROSSING THE NATION

ONE STEP AT A TIME

No travel agent could have planned it better. The Sierras in spring, the Rockies in early fall, the Appalachians in winter and, finally, the nation's capital in May.

What's different about this itinerary, however, is that it's all been on foot -- a colossal, 4,500-mile hike across America one step at a time, from the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge to the steps of the Capitol building.

On Wednesday, May 13, more than 70 backpackers will walk down Pennsylvania Avenue to the west front of the Capitol, where they will be welcomed by a waiting committee of congressmen, senators and other dignitaries. There, a ceremony on the Capitol steps will mark the official completion of the 13-month-long journey.

The Capitol ceremony will cap a week of hiking and special events along the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal between Harpers Ferry, W. Va., and Washington, D.C., on the Maryland side of the Potomac River. Following the arrival-day ceremonies, a number of hikers will then continue eastward, arriving May 27 at Cape Henlopen, Del. -- the end of a memorable Pacific-to-Atlantic transcontinental trek.

(more)

The Postum HikaNation odyssey, organized by the American Hiking Society and sanctioned by the U.S. Department of the Interior, was formed to call attention to the present popularity of hiking and its place in a low-energy future. General Foods Corporation, the makers of Postum instant grain beverage, has sponsored the event.

Traveling the distance has been a hardy group of backpackers, including 14-year-old Robert Burns of Benecia, Calif., and John Stout, a 69-year-old retired machinist from Seattle, Wash. Stout, who didn't start mountain-climbing until he was 50, says he "got the fever" when he read a newspaper article about the hike. He didn't take it seriously, however, until his wife demonstrated her approval by buying him a down jacket for the trip.

The hikers hail from 30 states and Canada and come from all walks of life, including a banker, photographers, a librarian, a longshoreman, a housewife, students and a television director.

"These wonderful men and women have been walking through some of the most picturesque scenery on this earth," said Jim Kern, president of the American Hiking Society. "We hope they will inspire others to help protect the nation's nature trails and contribute their time as volunteers preserving our natural birthright."

While 41 members of the existing group have carried 50-pound packs more than 3,000 miles, keeping to trails and forests whenever possible, thousands of other Americans have taken part in the journey, although most walked relatively short distances, joining the march as it passed through their neighborhoods, towns and states.

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In San Francisco on April 12 of last year, officials closed the upper deck of the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge to let hikers pass. Nearly 10,000 friends and reporters joined them on the bridge crossing, helping to make hiker history.

During the 13-month-long trip, Postum HikaNation backpackers cut a path from California through Nevada, Utah, Colorado and Kansas; Oklahoma, Arkansas and Missouri, and finally Illinois, Kentucky, Virginia, West Virginia, Maryland and Washington, D.C. And then it's on to Delaware and the Atlantic Ocean.

For further information about the Washington area events, call the Postum HikaNation toll-free information line, 202-387-8331, or the American Hiking Society, at 202-234-4609.

POSTUM HIKANATION ROUTE--The hardy hikers 4,500-mile coast-to-coast journey began April 12 of last year in San Francisco and will be officially completed at noon Wednesday, May 13, during a ceremony on the Capitol steps. A number of the group plan to continue eastward, arriving May 27 at Cape Henlopen, Del. The Postum HikaNation odyssey, organized by the American Hiking Society and sanctioned by the U.S. Department of the Interior, was formed to call attention to hiking as a popular outdoor pastime, and its place in a low-energy future. General Foods Corporation, the makers of Postum instant grain beverage has sponsored the event.