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Cross-country Hike 40 hearty souls' coast-to-coast feat

By: Bruce Reid

A cool morning breeze combed the treetops above historic Harper's Ferry W.Va., where the forces of the Potomac and Shenandoah rivers meet. There was a message in the air spoken on the prevailing winds of the "HikaNation High."

Early last Saturday, about 40 foot-strong individuals who have strided from the Pacific shores across 13 states and 4,500 miles joined forces with some of the nation's foremost hiking and outdoor enthusiasts to voice the message of HikaNation 1980.

The HikaNation project was organized by the American Hiking Society and sanctioned by the Department of the Interior's Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service to promote the fever of hiking and related outdoor activities.

On April 12, 1980, nearly 10,000 hikers led by Nobel Prize Laureate Glenn T. Seaborg marched across the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge, the symbolic beginning of HikaNation. The hikers were the first to cross the bridge on foot since its opening in 1936. A core group of about 40 hardy souls made

the nationwide trek that took them to the west steps of the Capitol in Washington Today. Saturday, they gathered at the National Park Service's Mather Training Center in Harper's Ferry to hold morning ceremonies before beginning a four-day march down the C&O Canal towpath into Washington.

Present were James Kern, one of the founders of the American Hiking Society and the driving force behind HikaNation; Paul Pritchard, President of the American Hiking Society and executive director of the National Parks and Conservation Association; Tom Floyd chairman of the Arrival Committee and hike coordinator from West Virginia to the Atlantic Ocean, Dr. Seaborg, Nobel Prize winner for chemistry in 1951 and planner of the California segment of the walk; and Ed Garvey, Spokesman for the Appalachian Trail and author of "Appalachian Hiker," who led the group into Washington.

Bradley Nash, former mayor of Harper's Ferry, delivered a proclamation written by Mayor H. W. Brawley in which he designated May 9, 1981, HikaNation Day.

After the HikaNation troop walks down Pennsylvania avenue today, they will be met by congressmen, senators, and other dignitaries on the steps of the Capitol. They will propose the establishment of a coast-to-coast footpath.

Congressional support has come from Rep. Phil Burton, D.-Calif. He reintroduced Omnibus Trails Bill 8087 in the 96th Congress (HR-861). The bill would

give private landowners near trails protection against trespassing and property damage and relieve them from liability lawsuits. HR-861 would give volunteer trail clubs the responsibility of trail construction and maintenance. That would save taxpayers almost \$2,000 per mile of trail upkeep per year.

The HikaNation group collected data on trails and hikers' needs for the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service and map information for the United States Geological Survey.

The core group of transcontinental hikers have at one time or another represented 30 states and Canada and have come from all walks of life. They include 14-year-old Robert Burns, a high school student from Beneca, Calif., 19-year-old Jerri Hudson from Alamogordo N.M., the youngest female; 45-year-old Toni "Mom" Martinazzi, a librarian from Portland, Ore.; senior female hiker Marceline Guerrein, 58, a banker and mother of five daughters from Alexandria, Va.; and the senior hiker in the group, John Stout, a retired machinist for Boeing from Seattle, Wash. Five-and-a-half-month-old Jamie Pyles was pushed along in a cart by her parents for some of the distance.

Lawrence "Monty" Montgomery has followed the hikers in an Airstream trailer since they left San Francisco to supply them with incoming mail, food pickups, and necessary transportation. Mr. Montgomery is the HikaNation national coordinator, trailmaster and father-figure for the hikers. He is

64-year-old retired Air Force colonel and veteran of three wars, a native of Pay, Ill., and a father of two.

He thought that no more than six hikers would finish in Washington, but nearly seven times that number converged on the Capitol. He was “provided the catalyst to keep the hikers going...and kept the ship on an even keel.”

Supporters and enthusiasts joined the HikaNation group on their final leg down the C&O Canal towpath. They honored the late Justice William O. Douglas in a ceremony at the Monocacy River Aqueduct. Justice Douglas played a key role in preserving the towpath as a national hiking and biking trail.

David Marple, a Baltimore resident for the last five years, is Maryland’s HikaNation walker. The 26-year-old Mr. Marple is a graduate of Towson State University and was a personnel director at the Maryland National Bank’s main office before making the trip. The “Big Blue Marple,” as he was dubbed by his hikers for carrying a seven-pound guitar on his pack, used money he saved for a down payment on a house to help finance the trip, which has cost him \$3,500. Daily costs averaged \$7 per hiker.

His hiking experience prior to the trip had been weekend excursions. Throughout the walk he developed tendonitis in his knees and both Achilles tendons, and suffered a broken metatarsal in Kentucky. Doctors prescribed a metatarsal bar, and

Mr. Marple's walk went uninterrupted. His morale rarely faltered except in the wet, cold, 16-hour nights in Kentucky.

The HikaNation route took the core group and Mr. Marple up to 13,000 feet over the Continental Divide in southern Colorado, through 10 inches of snow on the summit of Mt. Rogers in Virginia, through a sweltering 115 degrees in Utah, and below-zero temperatures in Missouri.

The route designed by Mr. Montgomery and others was a corridor, one degree of latitude wide at the latitude of San Francisco. Their path was indirect to avoid major cities and adverse weather. They passed through two major cities, San Francisco and Sacramento, and 75 small towns or villages to obtain signatures for a presidential-mayoral scroll.

Mr. Marple averaged 12 to 20 miles a day, as did the other hikers. He traveled alone or with one or two other hikers by day. His longest day, a night trek, took him 32 miles over the Henry Mountains in Utah between sunset and sunrise. The hikers camped more or less as a group by night. Their weekly schedule included six hiking days and a seventh day of rest.

The average weight of a hiker's backpack was 54.2 pounds with a week's supply of food. Mr. Marple's pack was up to 90 pounds when he made his 11-day trip over the Continental Divide.

HikaNation hikers had a steady diet of freeze dried food to keep their packs light. Besides that

they carried on their backs each hiker was allotted one cubic foot of space in the Airstream for extra clothes and food. The trailer also carried a 300-gallon water tank.

Mr. Marple described the HikaNation group as a “combination between a small town and a circus.” The hikers governed themselves through a steering committee which considered suggestions and complaints on topics ranging from how many miles to hike in a day to methods for celebrating holidays. A rotating Committee of HikaNation members ruled on behavior, setting up a sequence that involved a warning, probation and expulsion. The undying spirit of friendship is clearly visible among the HikaNation group. Mr. Marple plans to keep up a correspondence with his fellow hikers. “People who hike across the nation together are friends for life,” he said.

Mr. Marple said the HikaNation group was well-accepted nationwide. The reaction was one of curiosity, wonder and amazement. The reaction was one of curiosity, wonder and amazement. He said the trip has restored his faith in America.

Trailmaster Montgomery traveled ahead of the hikers to alert the authorities, obtain permission to cross private land and warn café and restaurant owners the 50 hungry hikers were on their way.

HikaNation officially ended when the hikers reached Washington, but some of the hikers will

continue on to the Atlantic at Cape Henlopen, Del. There they will dip their boots in the surf as they did on the Pacific Shores.

Capt. Scott C. Marple, father of David Marple, had arranged to have the hikers ferried across the Chesapeake Bay on two buoy tenders with the approval of the Department of Natural Resources. The tenders will pick up the hikers May 19 at the Annapolis city dock and ferry them across to the Department of Natural Resources' Terminal at Matapeake. Permission to cross the bay on the Chesapeake Bay Bridge was unobtainable. The coast-to-coast HikaNation odyssey will be official when the group reaches the Atlantic May 27.

During morning ceremonies in Harper's Ferry on Saturday, hikers autographed one another's blue and white "I hiked America" banners and gathered for a group picture. At 11 a.m. a parade of the cross-country hikers and followers led by a police escort marched down the streets of the historic town to the Potomac River. In single file they crossed a railroad bridge over the Potomac to reach the C&O Canal. The bridge is located at what is called "The Point." Three states, Virginia, Maryland, and West Virginia, and two rivers, the Potomac and the Shenandoah, converge there. In the Civil War, the Confederacy considered The Point to be their key to Washington. It too is HikaNation's key to Washington and the future of hiking nationwide.

Mr. Reid, of Baltimore, hiked the entire 2,000-mile Appalachian Trail, last year to raise money for the Kennedy Institute.