

THE JOURNAL

In partnership with Mountain Designs



VOLUME 1

Volume 1

This journal is in partnership
with Mountain Designs.



This month has been a whirlwind but also better than I could have imagined. We arrived in San Francisco on July 17 to a hot stinker of a summers day. Since then it's been pretty mild with some cold days. Odd for summer. We've been planning, preparing, building and executing since that date. We're attempting to be on the road for over a year recording and documenting our adventures, big and small from the cities to the beaches to the summits. We've also converted a van (soon to be our living quarters). This month we've explored places around San Francisco, as well as trips to Yosemite, Lake Tahoe and the Mammoth Lakes region, all in the Sierra Nevada. So far, we've only spent our time in California but we're hoping to make our way out to the desert and canyon country in the next couple of weeks. Stay tuned for that. For now, I hope you enjoy reading through some of our moments from the road and the trail.

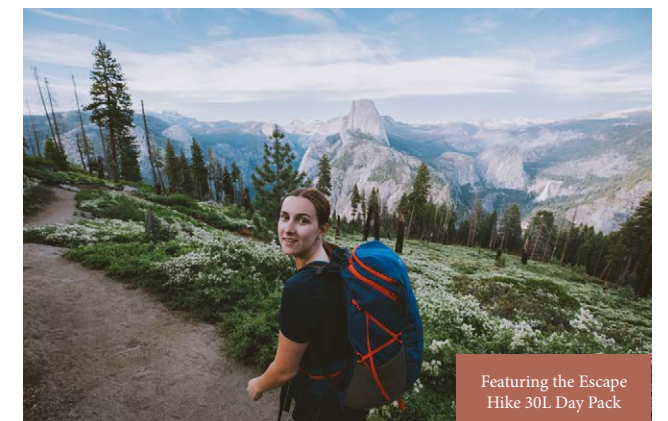


Welcome to The Journal

Hi all. This month has been really busy so let's dive in. This is the first of many journals to come, I'm so excited. Each month Madison and I will be documenting our travels and feelings as we make our way through North America, Canada and everything beyond and in between. We're stoked and we hope you are too! This will be our favourite project to date.

So let us introduce ourselves. I'm Harrison, lifestyle and adventure photographer and Madison, the photographers assistant, and travel companion. Both based out of Brisbane, Australia we now travel with wilderness and mountains embedded in our blood. We seek out the most crazy and memorable moments we can find. Whether we have 10 hours of hiking ahead of us, making that last minute sprint for sunset or driving 7 hours to the next beautiful place, it's always worth it, we've found.

Being outdoors is key to a great relationship. Seeing new things, going off the grid, being a dirtbag for a few days and experiencing places with each other. We've become accustomed to all things outdoors, and we want to bring you along on the ride.



Featuring the Escape
Hike 30L Day Pack



Featuring the Women's
Alta Softshell Jacket



The Gear

These are our favourite pieces of gear from Mountain Designs.

1. Womens Kodiak Fleece
2. Womens Cumulus GORE-TEX Jacket
3. Mens Cumulus GORE-TEX Jacket
4. Womens Ascend 600 Down Jacket
5. Expedition 2-Person Tent
6. Geo 2-Person Tent
7. Explorer 75L Hiking Pack
8. Voyager 65L + 15L Travel Pack
9. Mens Forge 600 Down Jacket
10. Travelite 700 Down Sleeping Bag
11. Airlite 9 Sleeping Mat
- Not Pictured: Airlite 5.5 Sleeping Mat, Perisher & Alta Softshell



Goals & Expectations

Hike more.

Learn to enjoy the smaller things.

Use less, reuse, minimise waste.

Go beyond comfort zones.

Explore wild places.

Tell a story.

Document places and character.

Wild Yosemite.

We arrived in the Yosemite Valley around 4pm on the 24th July. It was rather hot but a dry heat which didn't bother us too much because we're so used to the humid sub-tropical nature of Brisbane, Australia.

We had no agenda and we still had no idea where we'd be sleeping for the next couple of nights. I think the best adventures have no timelines and no set schedules. The best moments are fleeting, unprepared for, inconveint but also the most memorable.

It is summer here. I've never seen crowds as big as this. The parks are filled by 9am, the meadows are noisy, the main sights are jam packed with tourists and then there is me, who wants the complete opposite. I figured our best bet is to wake up early for sunrise and avoid the crowds.

We camped in the car overnight. Our 2003 Dodge Caravan, which we hadn't converted into a camper yet. This was our first night away from a home. Admittidly, we were a bit nervous, espically with all the bear talk. We did it anyway though. We had no curtains yet and the whole night I had my eyes peeled for bears. I guess there's a first for everything. I set the alarm for 4:30am and before we knew it is was time to get up and drive to the Sentinel Dome trailhead where it was cold and clear.

I put my Mountain Designs Forge 600 Down Jacket on over my Pro-Elite Fleece. Layering is the best method in the cold. If you're too hot, you can take a layer off, but multiple layers is the only way to beat the cold. I was snug above my hips, but below not so much - I forgot long pants. Great start to a cold morning! Madison wore her Kodiak Fleece and her Merino pants to keep warm.

'In every walk with nature one receives far more than he seeks.' - John Muir

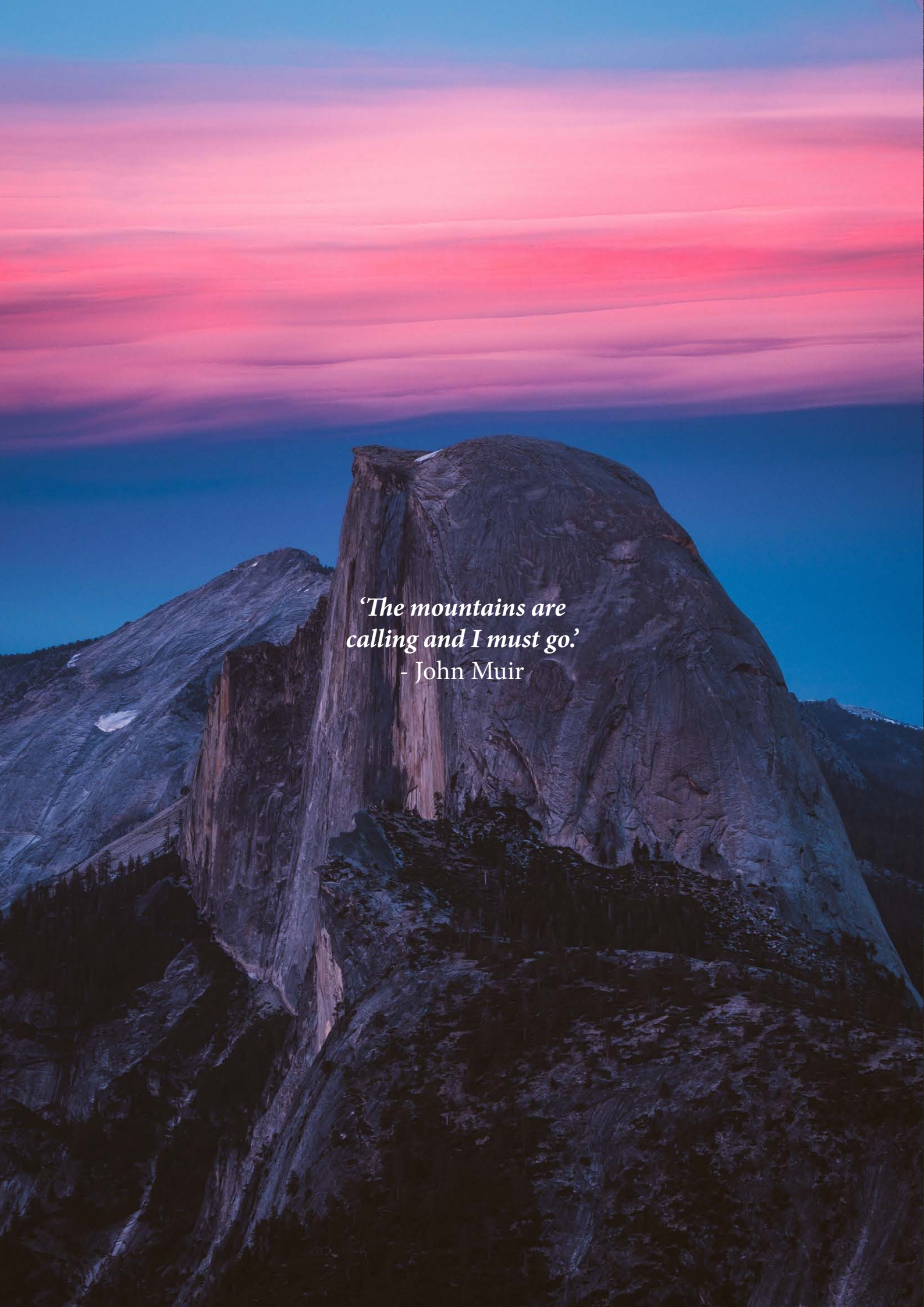
It was calm, no wind, but pretty cold. There was cloud on the horizon blocking the sun from showing. We were in need of that warmth as we waited almost 40 minutes after sunrise before the sun popped through. The valley came to life, the pines lit up golden and Half Dome in the distance had a gorgeous blue haze around it. This was simply one of the most beautiful scenes I've ever witnessed. These granite rocks are huge, like nothing you've seen before. To our North was Yosemite Falls, to the East was Half Dome and Clouds Rest, to the south was more wilderness and to the West was the famous El Capitan. Pictured below is El Capitan, 914m from valley floor to summit.



Just as I had imagined. This place is nuts. Unimaginable beauty in all directions. Due to the summer crowds we resorted to the trail where things were quieter. We woke up early and hiked to Sentinel Dome. No one else around. Complete solitude. As you can see here, one of the greatest views you can imagine.

Featuring the Women's
Kodiak Fleece.





*'The mountains are
calling and I must go.'*
- John Muir





Road Life? So Far, So Good.

We bought a second hand 2003 Dodge Caravan online with 143k miles on the clock. First question asked; how are we going to live out of this thing? Are we going to do it real simply or should we build a solid frame that will stand the test of time? We opted for a design that not only fitted our sleeping and sitting needs, but also our food and coffee addiction. *Why a minivan?* Better on fuel! We can stealth camp without attracting too much attention, and we think 'smaller the better' makes us consider what we need and what we don't.

Un-finished, but getting there!



**3 Days
14 Arguments
50 Screws, later.**

We have a frame! Sleepable in two ways with two singles or one queen and storage either side. The middle section removes to create a sitting area in the middle. This is by no means finished, but it's a start.



Our first night in the van.

A Journey Through the Sierra Nevada

The Sierra Nevada is wild, huge, kinda scary, fascinating and definitely compelling for the outdoor enthusiast. I've seen photos from this mountain range for years and something has drawn me to it. Maybe its the tall, straight pines, maybe its the granite rocks, all I know is its definitely not the bears, but thats a story for later.

It hasn't rained since we arrived in California 19 days ago. Summer is sunny but pretty mild, especially up here in the alpine. There is still a tonne of snow, the rivers are flowing like crazy, chipmunks and squirrels are everywhere and the stoke is as high as its ever been. Something makes me feel like these mountains are home. I want to explore every part of them as it is so different to home.

We just finished a week long trip through the Sierra, starting in Lake Tahoe, hiking through the Desolation wilderness, then onto the Eastern Sierra where we ventured deep into Ansel Adams Wilderness. This trip has given us a taste of road life here in the USA. It's going to be tough, but equally as rewarding. We have a solid kit of gear too, lightweight, durable exactly what we need in these conditons. Read through for some more intake on our gear lineup and some of it in use here in the backcountry.

Travelite 500 & 700 Sleeping Bags

From experience, it's important to pack as lightly as possible. Light gear makes everything easier, from uphill parts to the sore muscles after the hike.

Mountains Designs has really hit the nail on the head when it comes to producing lightweight gear. When hiking 20km's, I don't want to be weighed down anymore that I already am. Having a lightweight solution for keeping warm and sleeping gear is key. The Travelite Sleeping Bag range is incredibly small but gets the job done. I'm using the Travelite 500 (0 degree comfort) and Madison is using the Travelite 700 (-3 degree comfort). I've never used sleeping bags before that compress down to such a small size. It's nice to know I have extra room for snacks but I'm not compromising on performance.



Geo 2-Person Tent



Velma Lakes. 12.7km
Elevation Gain 649m



Ascend 600 Down Jacket



Banksia Merino Tee

Voyager 65L + 15L Travel Pack

DESOLATION WILDERNESS



Travelite 500 & 700 Sleeping Bags

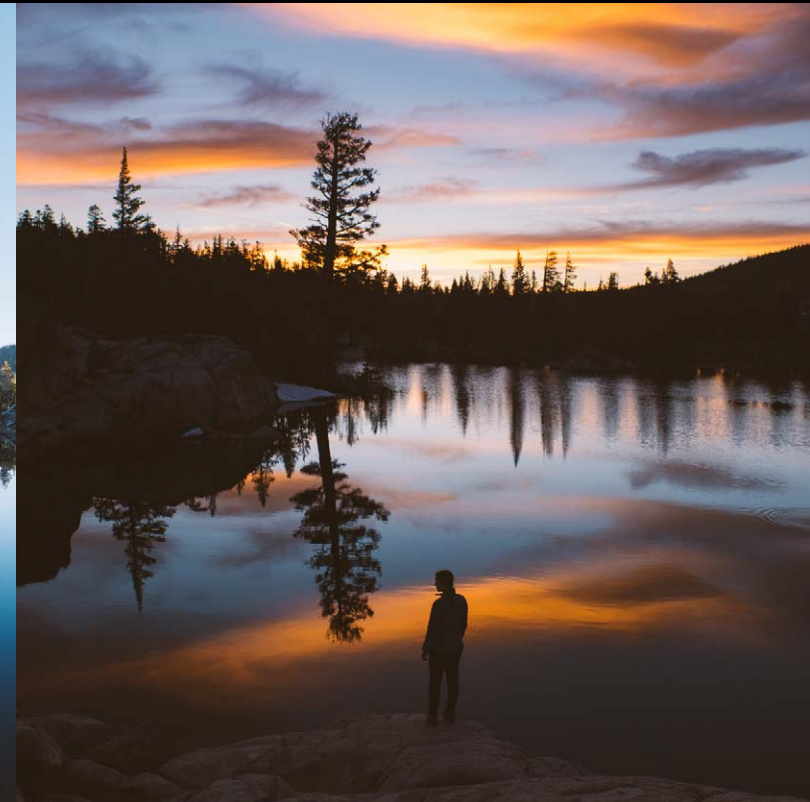
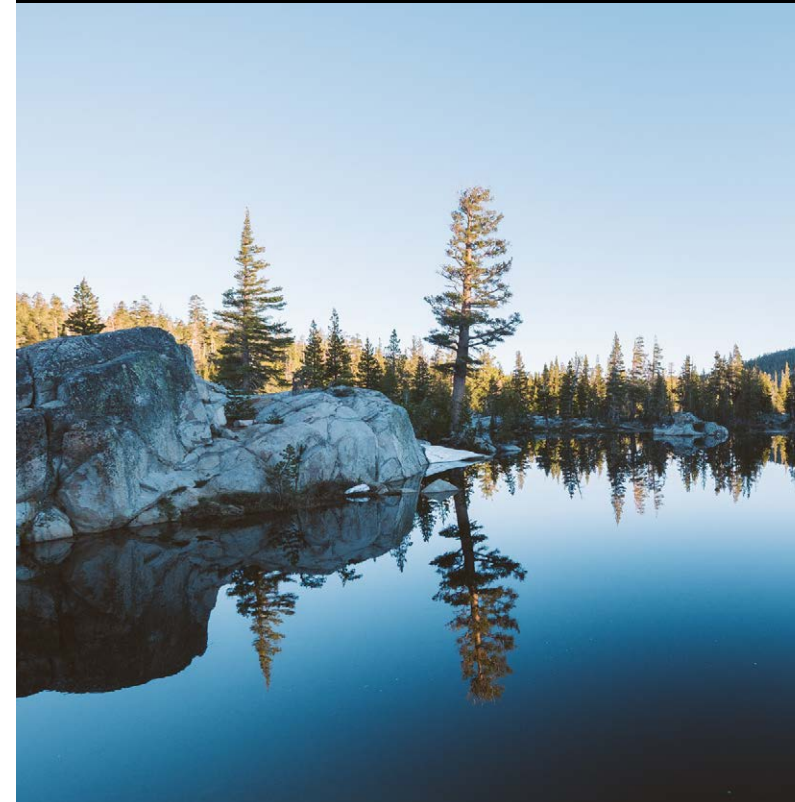
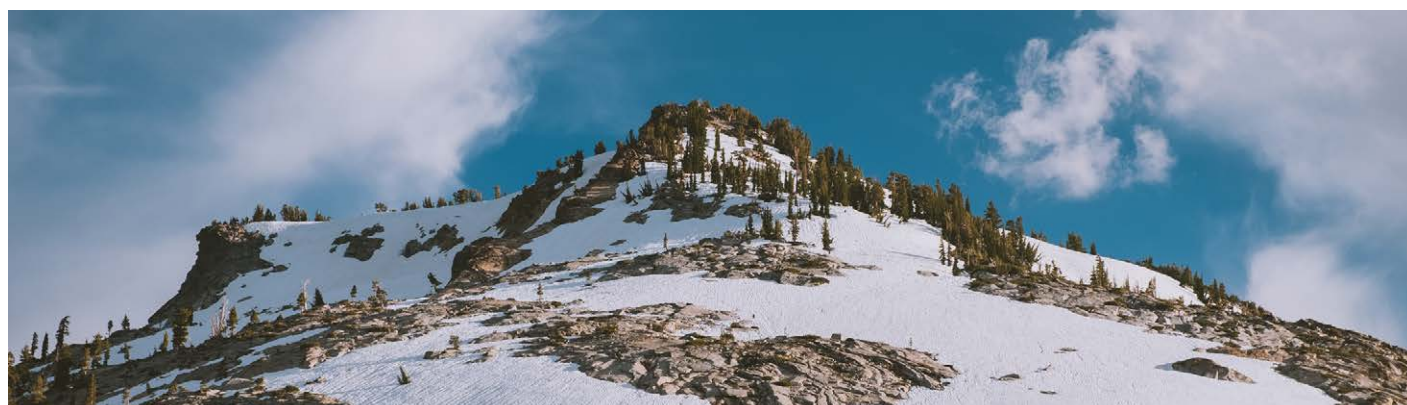
Airlite 9 Sleeping Mat



Zip off Hiking Pants



Perisher Softshell



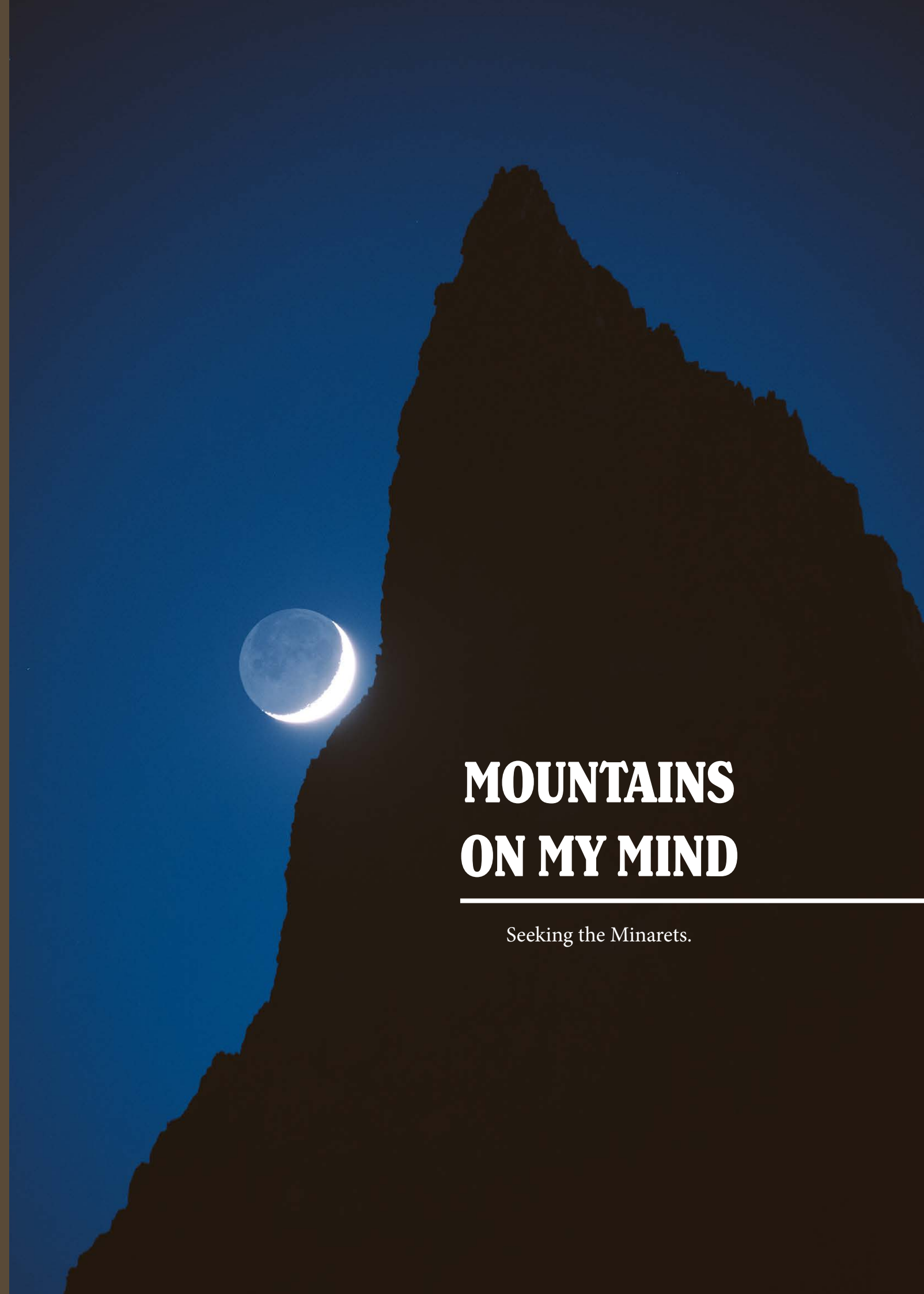
July 3rd 8:32pm

It's time for our first backpacking trip. We're here in the Desolation Wilderness. Don't know much about this place apart from the high elevation, millions of alpine lakes and heaps of bears. We pulled into a ranger station yesterday to ask about wilderness permits, our first time getting one. The friendly ranger told us to hike to Velma Lakes as it was the most defrosted part of the area. Dicks lake (the lake I had my mind set on) was still apparently frozen solid and posed some threats. The ranger then explained that there was a friendly bear who lived up near Velma, and that by the chance we ran into him, we were best to step off the trail and let him pass. WHAT?! Luckily we had just bought our first bear cannister. A legal requirement in bear country.

We set off today at 4:00pm, a little late I guess but the sun goes down at 8:30pm here. We knew we had elevation ahead of us but I feel like we weren't physically prepared. The elevation was challenging, but we made it. We arrived at 7:40pm at Upper Velma Lake, setting up camp and our super light and strong Geo 2-Person Tent before seeing one of the most gorgeous sunsets I've ever seen in the backcountry. See above image for reference.



Geo 2-Person Tent



MOUNTAINS ON MY MIND

Seeking the Minarets.

ANSEL ADAMS WILDERNESS



Minaret Lake. 24km
Elevation Gain 742m
River Crossings 2

Often the most memorable moments happen in high places. The places that challenge you. The places you have to climb towards. In the face of uncertainty, misdirection, we all know what that feels like. This trip was like that. Many moments I contemplated why I like doing what I do. Why I drag Madison along with me, and why I have such a hunger to be in a place like this. Better put, I'm attracted to the wild side. To be underneath a mountain range like this is what I dream of. This trek was not meant to be hard, but it really was, one of the most challenging to date. Although, in the face of these challenges, I think it was for the better.

July 5 9:13pm Minaret Lake: Sierra Nevada.

At 8.00am this morning, we weren't even sure if we were going to start this hike. We were cold, there were millions of mosquitos attacking us, I was doing some work in the front seat of our van while Madison made us breakfast and coffee. We watched as other hikers began their adventure. We finally decided, we were going to do it. We had our permit, our bags packed and we were ready to hit the trail. It was 9.00am. Little did we know; this hike was going to be the most challenging we have faced.

2 hours in and the trail had been quite nice so far, just winding along the creek at a gradient that was bearable. It was about then that we started to hit some snow, nothing we hadn't seen or experienced before. We trudged through until the map seemed to indicate we needed to cross the river we had been following. We looked around, hoping to see a bridge,

some stepping stones or a fallen tree to help us cross. Nothing. Just rapids, freezing cold, clear, deep snow melt and we needed to get to the other side. We scouted out what looked like the easiest place to cross a couple of hundred meters up stream; the shoes, socks and our pants came off and we walked through waist deep water. I couldn't afford a wrong step as I had all my camera gear and hard drives on my back. As we crossed, we gritted our teeth, holding back tears and trying to take each step as carefully as we could while our legs started to go numb. We made it to the other side! While we defrosted, dried off and got re-dressed, we prayed that that was the only river crossing we would have to face today (no such luck!).



With about 3km's to go, we were getting excited that we nearly made it, at this point, the snow started getting thicker and thicker – not what we were expecting in July! Apparently it's the biggest snow season in 12 years and the current snowpack is at around 160% the average. It was getting more difficult to follow the track, having to avoid icy overhangs and not knowing what could lie beneath the snow. My energy was getting low and I was too eager to get from the ice to the solid rock, Madison was following close behind watching each step, until I took a step that was too heavy and too close to the edge... I had stomped through the snow into a hole up to my waist – my worst nightmare. Luckily it was only my elbow that hit the jagged rock beside me resulting in some cuts and bruises and a shock. A few inches any other way and it could have been my head!

About 500m from the lake the snow was so thick and scary, we couldn't see any tracks. Coming from Brisbane, Australia we have never experienced snow in this form and quantity. Condensed, hard, slippery and hazards left right and centre. There were flowing creeks concealed underneath the snow and the sounds of cracks made us anxious for the final push.

The phone GPS was telling us where we were on the trail but it was at least 10ft below us. We looked up to where the lake was supposed to be. Between it and us stood some steep snow gradients, that looked impossible to climb in just hiking boots. We wondered if we're stupid for even considering going any further. It was 4.30pm and we contemplated returning to the car, almost 6 hours away and with 2 creek crossings between us. We looked around for at least 20 minutes, trying to find a way to get there – we were just so close! We sat and had a snack, thinking that we were about to start the journey home – our first hike that we weren't going to be able to complete.

Out of the blue, a day hiker who was clearly prepared for hiking in the snow appeared. We asked him some questions about the snow and he said he'd try the final push and yell back if it was safe. We saw him walk off in the distance, cautiously avoiding parts because of snow tunnels and holes. He yelled out and pointed where we should go. We put out packs on and walked off.

We followed his footprints until he made a sharp right up a steep slope. We couldn't climb that in regular hiking boots. We walked closer to the edge of the snow, soon realising a flowing creek was beneath us. We treaded lightly, scared it could give way at

any second. We looked up to see an even steeper slope ahead of us. We looked at each other, tired, hungry, sun burnt, and emotionally ruined, we powered on making each step slowly but surely. After a few slips which could have ended terribly, we reached a rocky island part and made 100m of ground before another snow field. By now I could feel the elevation and every breath was just a little harder. We've never hiked at 10,000ft, let alone climbed with so much concentration.

Finally, we could see the lake. It was frozen solid. I couldn't believe it. In photos from last July, the lake was fully thawed and there was not much snow. This was crazy - the ranger didn't tell us that the snow would be this thick! We crossed the final snow bridge and thanked the stranger who inspired us to push to the end. He was on his way back the Devil's Postpile. We wished him well and climbed the last few hundred metres.

After 9 hours of intense, challenging, hiking, we finally arrived. We sat, taking in the view for the last few hours of light. So thankful that we made it to this magnificent view. This is why we do it. This was the most crazy, challenging but incredibly beautiful hike I have ever done.

Now for the next challenge: getting back to the car in the morning. Plus, check out our camp spot below.





For an overnight backcountry camp, you need to be prepared for anything. While Harrison is always finding the amazing spots and planning our trips, I am the organiser, always in charge of packing our bags with things that seem to always be overlooked (for example, sunscreen, toothbrushes and rubbish bags). Although the sun is beating down harsh rays for 14 hours of the day, it still gets down to freezing overnight so you need to be able to rug up and stay warm. Below are some of our essential Mountain Designs gear that you will always find in our packs while we are in this beautiful region.

Packing List: Backcountry Camping 101

- Travelite 700 & 500 Down Sleeping bags
- Airlite 5.5 & 9 Sleeping Mats
- Banksia Merino Tees (So we never smell)
- Cooloola & Larapinta Hiking Convertible Pants (shorts in the day and long pants at night with thermals under)
- Merino thermals – to sleep in
- Womens Kodiak Fleece & Mens Pro-Elite Fleece
- Womens Alta & Mens Perisher Softshell
- Bear Cannister stocked with food (bear country)
- Merino Socks (can wear 2-3 times without smelling) Camera Batteries/Bodies and Lenses
- Power Banks
- Headtorches



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