



Long Trails

The transformative power of the thousand-mile trek

By Jayme Otto

We hike. We backpack. We camp. If we're lucky, we do these things often enough that they feel comfortable, natural. Out on the trail, we step directly upon the earth, bathe in streams, and rise then slumber with the sun. We slow down, exhale, and let the hardened exterior layers that build up during our time away from the wilderness begin to peel away, revealing a softer, truer self. We just don't typically do these things for five months straight. But that's the true magic of the long trail—its duration. And while people are drawn to epic treks for different reasons generated by different life circumstances, the expectation is always the same: to take enough time to find yourself again.

Sorrel Wilby and her husband Chris trekked 4,000 miles across Asia in 1991, and this spring they're leading a group through Nepal's Upper Dolpo—a Tibetan-Buddhist region of western Nepal that was closed to foreigners. Read more about their trek at womensadventuremagazine.com.

Te Araroa (The Long Pathway), New Zealand; 2,050 miles

Officially opening this spring, Te Araroa covers the entire length of New Zealand, from the sacred grounds of Cape Reinga at the northern tip of the isolated island, to the oystering port town of Bluff in Southland. Abundant huts and campsites make this D-I-Y trek manageable despite an average of 150 days on a trail through some of the country's most remote regions.

Resource Research beta from 27-year-old Brit Alex Ward and 24-year-old Canadian Shalane Hopkins. They are on-trail now, and if they complete on target in March, they'll be its first thru-hikers. missionlivelife.com

Via Alpina Europe; 3,100 miles

Europe's first trans-Alp trail, unveiled in 2005, stretches across eight countries, starting in Slovenia and arcing north and east through Austria, Germany, Liechtenstein, Switzerland, Italy, and France, before ending near the beaches of Monaco. Local delicacies and comfortable overnight lodges (think: fireside fondue) compete for highlight status with high-mountain scenery—including flowered meadows below 15,782-foot Mt. Blanc.

Resource Via Alpina's website—translated in five languages—details route descriptions, including directions, points of interest, and trekking tips. via-alpina.org

Great Himalaya Trail Nepal; 1,055 miles

The longest and highest alpine walking path in the world, the Great Himalaya Trail winds 2,800 miles from Tibet to Pakistan. The Nepal segment is the most accessible, but still hits remote territory: snaking around all ten of the country's 8,000-meter peaks, from the rhododendron forests fringing Mt. Kanchenjunga—the third-highest mountain on earth, through Sherpa villages in the shadow of Mt. Everest, to wildflower-covered passes near the Tibetan border.

Resource Join the inaugural 157-day guided trek of the Nepal segment with World Expeditions, or choose one of the seven stages ranging from 18 to 34 days. worldexpeditions.com

Pacific Crest Trail United States; 2,650 miles

The most diverse of America's footpaths, the Pacific Crest Trail traverses six of North America's ecozones, crossing 60 major mountain passes from the deserts of Southern California to the dripping rainforests of Washington state. Fewer people have finished a thru-hike of the PCT than have climbed Mt. Everest; most starting at the Mexico border in late April and averaging five to six months for the full thru-hike into Canada.

Resource The Pacific Crest Trail Association keeps updated conditions, statistics, and information for thru- or day-hikers accessing the trail. pcta.org