



Links To:
Journal '05
PCT Portal
AIDS/HIV Portal
» Media Coverage
Oakland Tribune
» Claremont Courier Daily Bulletin
Pitzer News
Donate!!
Haiku
More Links

CURRENT TOTAL RAISED FOR IAVI: \$4904.07 USD

The Claremont Courier

Pitzer Graduate Ventures 2,650 Miles on Foot

9 February 2005

Out of the ordinary questions such as "Will I need my ice axe?" have been commonplace in Michael Lissner's mind over the last few months. Mr. Lissner, a 2004 Pitzer College graduate, is gearing up—literally and figuratively—to hike 2,650 miles as he treads north from the bottom of California to Canada on the Pacific Crest Trail.

"I'd heard about it and it sounded cool and beautiful," Mr. Lissner said of his decision to make the trek this April through September. "I needed a goal, so I thought, 'Let's go'."

Tramping on the trails for more miles per day and many of us log in a year, Mr. Lissner and two companions will average 17.9 miles a day, beginning at about 15 per-day and amping up to a whopping 26 per day as he finishes the home stretch. While the physical aspect of the foot-journey will take its toll, he remains convinced that the emotional challenge will be more strenuous.

"A lot of people older and in worse shape than me have done it successfully," he explained. "I went to a kick-off party and most people seemed to be in mediocre shape. I thought, 'Okay, these guys must be ready mentally'. I know that backpacking every day for five months is going to be disastrous on my mind."

Projecting into the future, he foresees "not having a good day, then having another bad day, and then another after that". Struggling with fatigue and soreness are par for the course, he realizes, but he plans to just keep going and "eventually wake up and feel better one day".

"That's the current plan," he said.

To attack the trial with as much stamina and strength as possible, Mr. Lissner devotes much of his time to training during these months preceding his endeavor. His regimen includes mountain-biking, backpacking, hiking, running, swimming and climbing bleachers.

On the more subdued side of preparation, Mr. Lissner spends time sewing his own gear—making packs, pants, sacks and other necessities that are lighter and cheaper than conventionally available items. Backpack weight is a key consideration for the PCT journey and his goal is to keep his pack under 30 pounds at all times. To minimize the burden, he has trimmed his sleeping pad down to half of his 6 foot, 5 inch height. Only a waterproof jacket, one shirt, one pair of shorts, one pair of pants and a few other essentials will accompany him for the entire 5 months. A solitary "luxury item", as he described it will make its way into his pack: a second pair of socks.

OBVIOUSLY unable to carry enough food and water for the almost half-year hike, the logistics of supplying himself with vittles are rather pesky. While he can restock his stash in periodic towns that are dotted along the trail, Mr. Lissner also plans to send himself a number of "care packages" that he will pick up at post offices in strategic locations.

Mr. Lissner, who currently works in Berkeley as an inside salesperson for his father's business, is eagerly anticipating the journey, most fervently looking forward to the "gorgeous" Washington section.

But Mr. Lissner is embarking on the challenge for more than merely personal reasons. In tandem with his fitness training, he is seeking sponsorships and raising funds that he will donate to the International AIDS Vaccine Initiative (IAVI). This idea emerged through influence from an acquaintance who is completing an AIDS marathon in Hawaii.

"After talking with her, I thought maybe I should put some time into this and do a fundraiser, too," he shared.

Also influencing his decision to make his hike of service to AIDS work was Microsoft billionaire, Bill Gates. Mr. Lissner recently read a book that questioned why Mr. Gates, with

all of his wealth, hadn't donated much at one point.

"[Bill Gates] was looking for the right cause and for the right place to donate [his money]. Eventually, he donated it to AIDS work," Mr. Lissner said. "And I consider him a pretty smart guy."

After cyber-traipsing on the Internet, looking for an organization "efficient in fundraising and with a good mission statement", Mr. Lissner stumbled upon IAVI—which, incidentally, is the same program to which Mr. Gates gave bucket-loads of cash.

Originally seeking per-mile sponsorships, Mr. Lissner determined that it made more sense to offer people "the opportunity to give a chunk of money". With a goal of \$5,000, he is well on his way with approximately \$1,700 raised thus far.

Knowing with certainty that IAVI will benefit after his mountain-desert-forest challenge, Mr. Lissner is less certain about his own post-PCT future. Though in possession of an English degree, he is considering a tangential move into mechanical engineering, which would require going back to school.

"I don't know right now. I'm purposely keeping everything pretty vague. Everything I decide know will most likely change with all that hiking and thinking," he admitted.

UNCERTAIN about his future—but confident he can complete the 2,650 northbound miles—he is sure that personal transformations will take place along the trail. What they will be he has yet to encounter, but he has a few guesses.

"I will probably be more patient and have greater respect for the wild," he ventured.

To make a contribution toward Mr. Lissner's hike and IAVI, he may be contacted at (510) 547-4299 or at mlissner@aidshike.org. His website may also be accessed for additional information: www.aidshike.org. Information on the International AIDS Vaccine Initiative may be found at www.IAVI.org.

—Brenda Bolinger
