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The Inland Valley Daily Bulletin

Pitzer Grad to Attempt Mexico-to-Canada Hike
By Jason Newell

22 January 2005

Michael Jay Lissner has a long walk ahead of him.

The recent Pitzer College graduate plans to hike from Mexico to Canada this spring and summer, equipped only with about 8 pounds of gear that will carry him along a winding 2,650-mile path through the mountains, deserts and forests of the Pacific Coast states.

But the challenge, one that has beckoned since he first set foot on the Pacific Crest Trail as a child, is only one of the goals this 22-year-old has set.

"Occasionally people would ask me, 'Are you doing this for a cause?' or 'Why are you doing the trip?'" said Lissner, who has spent the past two years seriously preparing for the trek. "So that kind of made me want to do it for a cause."

As he waits for the April start of his epic journey, Lissner is using the trip as a way to raise money for AIDS research. By the end of the five-month hike, he hopes lump sum and by-the-mile contributions will result in \$5,000 or more for the International AIDS Vaccine Initiative, a global not-for-profit organization searching for a vaccine to prevent HIV infection and AIDS.

For Lissner, who graduated from Pitzer in May with a bachelor's degree in English and World Literature, the strenuous journey will be a far cry from the day hikes he made up Mr. Baldy as a college student, he said.

"A typical day will include waking up at dawn, wolfing down a bunch of carbohydrates, hiking a couple hours, eating a meal, hiking a couple more hours, eating a meal, then hiking for the rest of the day," he said.

A past Boy Scout and Eagle Scout, the avid outdoorsman isn't going unprepared, he said.

In the past two years, he's read dozens of books and manuals on backpacking and spent countless hours researching the Pacific Crest Trail, which snakes up from the San Diego County-Mexico border through San Bernardino and Los Angeles counties on its way through Oregon and Washington.

He's learned all about nutrition—he'll be hitchhiking from the trail into town every five days or so to replenish his food supply—and the importance of being in superb shape, something he achieves by running up and down bleachers for an hour or two several times a week.

And to save his back, he's giving himself as light a load as possible, including a homemade backpack that weighs about 11 ounces and a homemade sleeping bag that weighs in at just more than 20.

"If you want it that light, you either have to pay a fortune or you have to make it yourself," he said.

Lissner will be accompanied by a friend throughout the course of the trek, and will be joined by another after about 1,000 miles—something that should make the journey a bit easier.

Only about 100 people hike the entire course of the trail in a given season, said Liz Bergeron, executive director of the Pacific Crest Trail Association.

Like Lissner, many hikers use their journeys as a way to champion a cause, including someone who told her this week he'd be hiking to raise awareness about California's population explosion, Bergeron said.

"Just about any cause you can think of, they're raising money on the PCT," Bergeron said.

For his AIDS research cause, Lissner has set up a Web site—www.aidshike.org—where

donors can learn more about his plans and make contributions. So far he has raised nearly \$1,300.

As for the hike itself, Lissner has no doubt it will be a life-changing experience. "I'm purposefully not making too many plans for after the trip," he said, "because whatever they are, I'm sure they'll change during the trip."
