

From the desk of Joel Broder



First Written March 3, 2012 and updated periodically

I fell in love with mountains and hiking almost from the first day I arrived in Arizona (1978). I drove to the base of what turned out to be Camelback Mountain, parked my van, and proceeded to bushwhack up the southeast face in my Nike tennis shoes. I now know better than to bushwhack.

I labored for what seemed like hours only to get to the top and find a scout troop waiting for me. Low and behold there was actually a trail from the other side (Echo Canyon)! And so it began.

When I was 19, my friend Dan M. and I hiked down the Bright Angel trail in the Grand Canyon to the river and back in one day. I have since hiked the Canyon many times including later doing the death march (56 mile triple rimmer) with Dan M. in about 22 hours.

The early Grand Canyon experiences, including a near death experience on South Kaibab, fueled my desire to hike further, higher, deeper, longer and in varying conditions. And so it continued.

Along the way, I discovered that running the trails, up and down, was exhilarating and added to the challenge. Occasionally I can get friends to go with me on my adventures, but many times I am left to my solo endeavors. In these instances I get to cruise at my own pace and fire off endorphins that allow my thinking to be big and my spirit to soar.

In addition to countless local trails, I have climbed/hiked/run (in no particular order)...

Mt. Kilimanjaro – Tanzania. Tallest in Africa. Start hiking at 4,888' and summit 5 days later at 19,341'. Machame route up and coca-cola down (1 day decent). Safari too. "Bathrooms" were very memorable.

Mt. Aconcagua – Argentina. Tallest in South America. Start hiking at about 9,000' and summit 13 days later at 22,840'. Upper Vacas route up and Normal route down (2 day decent). Most challenging adventure yet.

Mt. Rainier - Tallest in Washington, USA. Start hiking at 5,400' and summit the next day at 14,110'. Descend same day as summit. Guide, crampons, ropes and ice axe required. Crevasses always a present danger.

Mt. Shasta - California, USA. Start hiking at about 7,900' and summit the next day at 14,179'. Descend same day as summit. Glissading was a dangerous blast. Crampons and ice ax required. First experience with hard shell boots.

Mt. Whitney - California, USA. Tallest in lower 48 states. Start hiking about 8,400' and summit at 14,505'. One day up and down. 22 miles RT. Running down 99 switchbacks a total rush.

Mt. Borah - Tallest in Idaho, USA. Start hiking at 7,400' and summit at 12,668' (which is 5,262' in just over 3.5 miles). Chicken Out Ridge gets its name for a reason. Ice ax and crampons suggested.

Bryce Canyon - Utah, USA. So long ago, I can hardly remember. Once with daughters and once with Dan M. Beautiful scenery and memorable camaraderie.

Zion National Park - Utah, USA. So long ago. I think it started at 8,726' summit and drops down to 3,666'. One day round strip.

Grand Canyon - Arizona, USA. Rim 2 rim 2 rim non-stop on 2 separate occasions. First hike: Bright Angel trailhead starts at 6,792' and goes to the river at 2,460', then up North Kaibab trail to 8,060', then reverse order. 46 miles RT in 22 hours. Second hike: South Kaibab route slightly shorter but took 24 hours.

I have run to the river many times and cranked back up to the top after a relaxing lunch beach side.

Mt. Humphreys - Tallest in Arizona, USA. Start hiking at 8,800' and summit at 12,637'. One day 9.5 mile RT. Phenomenal run down.

Mt. Humphrey's another day...Hiked the Summit Trail from the parking lot to within about 400' of the summit buffeted by 60 mph winds and hail. Came down to the saddle where I picked up the Weatherford Trail and hiked/ran down the back side of the mountain to the Kachina Trail and back to the Summit Trailhead. 20 miles and 10.5 hours RT.

Pike's Peak - Colorado, USA. Start hiking at 6,700' and summit at 14,100'. About 26 miles RT in one day. I lost the direct trail going up and after an excursion on the gravel road managed to summit. Great music provided by ex-girlfriend.

Pike's Peak Redemption...For my 55th birthday, I hiked the Pike's Peak marathon route and did not get lost this time. 13 miles up, 13 miles down, in 13 hours RT. Weather, gear, fuel and body all optimal.

Long's Peak - Colorado, USA. Start hiking at 9,405' and summit at 14,259' (16 miles RT in one day). One of the more treacherous hikes north of Keyhole. Hiked this 2 days after Pike's Peak.

Palm Springs Skyline Trail (Cactus to Clouds) - California, USA. Starts at 450' and we stopped at about 8,600' at the tram station. About 12 miles one way \pm 8 hours. Ran out of weather and time, so no summit. Took the tram down. This may be the largest single day one way elevation gain except for rim 2 rim 2 rim.

Phoenix 7 summits (2 separate occasions). Single day 22 miles: Papago, Camelback, Piestewa, North Mountain, South Mountain, Lookout, Shaw Butte.

In addition to these great challenges, I have ran the PF Chang's half marathon twice, countless 10K's, 10 milers and the Fountain Mountain Triathlon twice (finished once) which was 1.2 mile Saguaro Lake swim + 56 mile mountain ride + 13 mile run.

I hike/trail-run almost every week – sometimes 2x. You will frequently find me in the Phoenix Mountain Preserve or the McDowell Sonoran Preserve. I'm the guy running in boots, bike gloves, safety glasses and a backpack!

I am 55+ now (September 2015) and still in love with the trails. Thankfully my heart, lungs, legs and knees remain strong. When I strap on my pack and take my first few steps on a familiar trail it feels like I am seeing an old friend again.

Every time I finish a big climb I swear I will never do another. And yet challenge and adventure are like a siren song. Is there one more ahead of me? Denali perhaps? Dunno. But never say never and keep on trekking.

Update: May 2017

Denali - Alaska, USA. I set out to climb Denali (20,300'). The timing seemed right to take on perhaps my hardest challenge yet. This adventure did not go as I had envisioned and I did not summit after spending 2 weeks on the hill. Temps reached -20F at 14,000' and my equipment and body betrayed me. I would climb no higher. You can read about this adventure, frostbitten hands and all, at <http://broderdenali2017.blogspot.com/>. That is the end of my cold weather challenges.