

Vicarious John Muir Trail – Allison’s Epic and Well-Fed Adventure

Twelve Years After the First MTS Hike From Florence Lake to Mt. Whitney



Left to Right: Allison at the bottom of LeConte Canyon, panorama along Sapphire Lake heading to Muir Pass

Introduction

Last summer, Allison, Marshall, and I signed up for one of my top three most challenging hiking experiences: the John Muir Trail (JMT) section that encompasses 150 miles between Kings Canyon, Sequoia, Whitney, and the Golden Trout Wilderness - run by Mountain Travel Sobek (MTS). And then we began training, hoping to complete this 15-day, mule-supported trek in August 2016. In 2004, I did the maiden voyage version of this trip and wrote a detailed (and sometimes hilarious) account of this epic hike. Indeed, this report needs to be read alongside said story because MTS has made so many improvements since that first heavy-personality group broke them in (of course, when I did this trip, I paid \$3400 – where the improved trip has almost doubled in cost). But not all of us would get to enjoy these splendors: Marshall bowed out first given serious plantar fasciitis following our big hiking trip to Patagonia. And despite a fast recovery from March sinus surgery, my ramped-up training stress-fractured the fourth metatarsal of my right foot – causing me to cancel in May. Alas – my ENT warned me I'd have more energy after finally fixing my nose... and apparently I did! Sufficed to say, it has been a sometimes-frustrating summer full of adjustments. Despite everything, I felt most sorry for Allison because she was now “stuck” doing this trip effectively alone – and, as the departure date grew closer, she seemed more sad and upset... which made me sad and upset because I truly loved the JMT and was so excited she was going to do it. How could I vicariously enjoy it when she had seemingly lost her JMT mojo? Thankfully, we came up with the same idea almost on the same day, inspired by “PCT Erin (a.k.a. Wired)” – whom we religiously follow. Why don't we invest in a DeLorme InReach GPS messaging device and message/spot-check during the route? It was not horribly expensive (\$280 for the device, \$92 for a month of unlimited texting, including activation fees (160 characters/text - amenable to haiku's) – easy to turn on/off in terms of contracts) and it didn't seem as co-dependent as a satellite phone (which we'd rented/experimented once on a Utah trip). That Allison exchanged nearly 1000 messages with family and friends over the course of this trip tells you how much we used - and LOVED - it.



Haiku 8/19/16

Fresno is roasting
Mountains seem so far away
Don't Stop Believin'

Haiku 8/20/16

Walkin' the Joaquin
How have I missed you all day?
Delicious bathing!

August 19-20, 2016 - Fresno to Florence Lake and Just Past Muir Ranch (5.6 miles, 1000 feet up, 700 feet down)

Given fewer direct flight options (than in 2004), Allison arrived in Fresno as the group meeting was underway. Like me, Allison was the youngest client (Allison did this trip at 32 – I was 36). On Allison's trip, the average client age was mid-50's, mine was mid-60's. The max group size allowed on a JMT permit is 15; in our case, that meant 2 hiking guides, 1 cowboy (1 horse & 5 mules), and 12 clients. Since my trip, MTS has dropped the client number to 11 – so Allison's trip had 9 clients (after Marshall & I dropped), 1 cowboy (1 horse & 6 mules), 2 hiking guides, and 1 assistant. While both trips included 2 food drops (LeConte and Charlotte), Allison's food team included the addition of the “cooler mule” with all kinds of new, perishable deliciousness. That said, there were miscommunications between the MTS office and the guide service: Allison was incorrectly told by MTS that all meals were one-pot camp-fare, meaning it was hard to accommodate vegetarians without affecting the whole group (such WAS the case on our trip but is no more). Both trips used the outstanding High Sierra Pack Station – despite similarly wandering mules from time to time. All 3 guides/assistants on Allison's trip were from the Southern Yosemite Mountain Guides (SYMG); in our case, our leader had no affiliation, but our assistant was SYGM. On my trip, singles slept in truly 1-man bivy-style tents (unfortunately NOT assigned – which drove us crazy); on Allison's trip, singles slept in 2-man tents (and you kept/maintained your own tent the whole time). While the tents were high quality, Allison was given 2 leaky thermarests.

The next day, Allison (like us) made the 3-hour drive UP, UP, UP to Florence Lake – riding the ferry across the lake and then hiking. While the day was hot (mid-80's) for both of us, only Allison got thunderhead build-up and rain. Where we hiked 7 miles (to the Kings Canyon boundary), Allison hiked 5 miles – camping along the San Joaquin shortly after passing Muir Ranch (officially at Shooting Star Meadow). Allison first checked in at 5:30 and was, as predicted, hot but happily bathed. She indicated that the leader had everyone hiking slowly in preparation for the big stuff. At the time, she said the mules hadn't arrived (which was much later than our timing). As predicted by many webcam images (I texted regular weather beta using

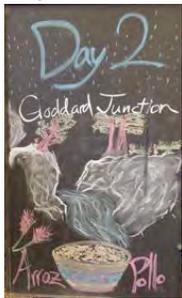
NOAA forecasts and live webcams at Tuolumne, Mammoth, Bishop, and Whitney), they had LOTS of thunder and then some rain around 9:30. But she sounded in excellent spirits and we enjoyed being able to message in real-time while she was “in tentia” during the rain. Given the minimalist food situation on the 2004 trip (I lost 10 lbs and, like most others, hungry a LOT), Allison (who lost 5 lbs but was never hungry) made a strong effort to document what were – at times – shockingly extravagant meals on this trip... most accompanied by fanciful chalk-scape menu boards hand-drawn by the assistant (alas – she missed tonight’s board). And so – each day’s summary will conclude with food porn... TODAY: lunch included self-built sandwiches with turkey, avocado, Havarti and peaches; dinner featured fresh salsa/chips with sous vide carne asada tacos (Allison had a veggie/bean burrito bowl) and a pre-packaged almandine cake for dessert (like most desserts/sweets – the source was Trader Joe’s). I’m getting fatter just writing these things down!



Haiku (8/21/16)
 Rock and river dance
 Higher evolution waits
 Anticipation

BONUS Haiku (8/21/16)
 Bean burrito bowl
 Gases popped my thermarest
 Why I cannot poop

August 21, 2016 – Muir Ranch to Goddard Junction (7 miles, 1700 feet up, 1000 feet down)



Today’s itinerary took both our parties to the same spot: Goddard Junction, the base of the big climb UP to over 10K Evolution. We enjoyed a shorter day with no rain; Allison had 2 more miles to make up – and afternoon thunder/lightening with bigger rain. Allison checked in a few times, including at lunch along the river and once again in camp. I was surprised they got such an early start (8:20) but she said they took a very long lunch. Arriving in camp around 2, Allison took a nap while this massive rainstorm blew over. At some point, they replaced her first leaky thermarest – but, alas, the second one also had a slow leak. Although the storm had fully passed by dinner, Allison seemed concerned about what were now TWO more days of forecast afternoon thunderstorms given how high/open Evolution is. Food Porn: breakfast offered muffins, fresh fruit, yogurt, and granola, lunch included self-built lettuce wraps with chicken, fresh vegetables, hummus, and goat cheese; dinner featured a fresh butter lettuce salad and from-scratch arroz con pollo with s’mores for dessert.



Haiku (8/22/16)
 Changing over time
 Sun, clouds, rain, thunder, clouds, sun
 Gaze, hunker down, gaze



August 22, 2016 – Goddard Junction to Storm/Logjam at Darwin Bench Meadows (7.6 miles, 1800 feet up, 430 feet down)



Today’s itinerary should have taken everyone to Evolution Lake (10.8K) but Allison’s horrible weather forced an early stop 1.5 miles/800 feet short of said goal (at Darwin Bench). Allison first checked in around 11 during lunch at McClure Meadows. But then the weather came in fierce and very cold, with thunder during lunch and a full-blown storm by 12:15. While hunkered down at Darwin Bench waiting for the mules and warming up with a fire (only allowed 10K or lower), they received intel that multiple parties weren’t leaving Evolution because of the storm. Thus, they stayed put for the night, enjoying classic alpenglow after the storm passed. Although Allison was in good spirits, she was apprehensive about tomorrow given more storms and a now-15 mile day with a 5 a.m. wake-up. Food Porn: breakfast offered savory avocado/bean/salsa toast, lunch included caprese salad with figs; dinner featured wild rice, sun-dried tomatoes and Poblano relish with lemon/honey-glazed chicken breasts – and chocolate chip cookies.



Haiku (8/23/16)
 Mules - why run away?
 Don't you want to see Muir Pass?
 Stop being asses.



August 23, 2016 – Darwin Bench Meadows to Little Pete Meadow (15.3 miles, 2500 feet up, 3500 feet down)



Allison messaged at 6:15 a.m. with news that, despite good skies and everyone up at 5, the mules ran away overnight (we had a similar problem after Forester Pass but ours was not a crucial day with incoming storms/food-drops). The mules were found in 90 minutes, enabling hiking by 7:30. Their weather was good until around 3 - with GREAT views across Evolution, Muir Pass, and upper LeConte Canyon. But then another great storm consumed the range, meaning a windy/rainy descent to Little Pete Meadow. Little Pete is a little above where we camped/met the incoming mule food team (they ride in, camp, and ride back via Dusy/Bishop Pass). Unfortunately, Allison's mule food team was late (given the storm), making for a VERY long and challenging day (mine was challenging for different reasons – namely a day of knee pain that scared the crap out of me, causing me to question my ability to do this trip!). Food Porn: breakfast was expedition/fast cereal, lunch was expedition/fast salami, cheese, crackers, and fruit; the fast and stormy dinner featured loaded burgers with potato chips.



Haiku (8/24/16)
Up Golden Staircase
My heart going BOOM BOOM BOOM
Can't wait for a nap!



August 24, 2016 – Big Pete Meadow to Lower Palisades Lake (12 miles, 3100 feet up, 1300 feet down)



Today's similar itinerary involved a woody drop followed by a hot and sunny climb UP the Golden Staircase, ending at one of the most beautiful campsites on this route - perfect forecasts all-around. The burn area pre-staircase has visibly grown up since 2004, and the stock were allowed to stay at Lower Palisades this time around. Allison checked in from camp at 4:30, confirming a hot climb followed by an excellent swim in the lake. This seemed like good news because she messaged late last night reporting being desperate for sleep. Where my trip low-point was LeConte, though, Allison's was here: exhausted, no appetite (altitude?), emerging ankle pain, and news that a teammate needed to be med-evac'd. Food Porn: breakfast was pastries with melons and yogurt, lunch included roast beef spirals with avocado, cheese, chutney, and nectarines; dinner featured chorizo and potatoes with corn-bean salad and toffee brittle. Although it was a pleasant afternoon/evening, Allison's tree-hung clothing was frozen solid overnight – demonstrating an ongoing trend on her trip.



Haiku (8/25/16)
Shoot – where's my tampon?
Nothing Mathers anymore...
John Muir – PERIOD!

BONUS Haiku (8/25/16)
Detached retinue
Can't lose another teammate
Everyone Mathers

August 25, 2016 – Lower Palisades Lake to South Fork Kings River (9.5 miles, 1700 feet up, 2300 feet down)



Today's similar itinerary involved a big climb over impressive Mather Pass followed by a long stark drop through Center Basin. In 2004, we were supposed to then climb another 1000 feet to Marjorie Lakes – but we hit a cold storm on Mather and camped low instead. It is good to see MTS has kept our itinerary because the Marjorie climb seems a nutty way to end a hard day! Although Allison enjoyed an excellent forecast, the day's mood was somber because of the helicopter med-evac situation. Also, it was now clear Allison's left inner ankle tendon was hurting more than just a day. Even so, she messaged at 1 with news that they were on Mather Pass – and then from camp at 6. Allison finally inherited a working thermarest from the evac'd team-mate. Food Porn: breakfast was granola with dried fruit and coconut, lunch included turkey wraps with smoked Gouda, cucumbers, and fresh greens ; dinner featured grilled cheese sandwiches (with bacon, avocado) and tomato soup with chocolate toffee bars. Having enjoyed a similar meal on the Alesk, I LOVED to hear they are doing grilled cheese and tomato soup on the JMT!



Haiku (8/26/16)

Congrat's – half way done
Glen, Forrester, Whitney left
Feet don't fail me now!



August 26, 2016 – South Fork Kings River to Upper Twin Lakes (7.8 miles, 2300 feet up, 1700 feet down)



Today was somewhat different: a climb over the Pinchot Pass quarry followed by a drop to camp. In 2004, we camped high near the Ansel Adams pond (stock camped lower). Allison and the stock camped lower at Twin Lakes. Where we got to camp early and endured a long rainstorm, Allison arrived later to good weather, a brief shower, and then fantastic stargazing! Allison worked with the guides to tape her ankle, knowing she had a couple lighter days to improve. Indeed, Allison finally confessed this was a very hard trip! Even so, she was sleeping and truly bonding with her remaining teammates! Food Porn: breakfast was quinoa with honey, nuts, and berries, lunch included pita pockets with Mediterranean filling fare (dolmas, tomatoes, cucumbers, olives, feta, and sardines); dinner featured red/meat sauce pasta with tomato bruschetta and chocolate. Since the assistant guide/chalk artist hiked out Taboose Pass with the spouse of the med-evac'd teammate, the clients did their best to chalk-scape the menu board.



Haiku (8/27/16)

Painted Lady Smiles
On a sunny day like this
Don't think about Glen!



August 27, 2016 – Upper Twin Lake to Arrowhead Lake (10 miles, 2200 feet up, 2500 feet down)



Today's similar itinerary involved a long gentle drop to Woods Creek (second lowest point along their JMT section) and then a gentle climb to Arrowhead Lake in the scenic Rae Lakes Basin. Indeed, Rae Lakes remains one of my other favorite campsites on this whole route – despite our crazy-bad weather! While we both camped at the same place, our 2004 team arrived in the middle of an icy rain-hail storm – vs. Allison, who enjoyed sunny skies all day. Today, Allison checked in from lunch at noon by the suspension bridge over Woods Creek. Later, she checked in at 5 from camp at Arrowhead Lake. She loved Fin Dome, calling it mini-Fitzoy, and reported an excellent swim in the lake. Team spirits were high! Food Porn: breakfast was chilaquiles (fried tortillas topped with salsa, eggs, refried beans, etc.), lunch included avocado-mint-mango sandwiches; dinner featured vegetarian curry (sweet potatoes, Shiitake mushrooms, and pineapple), naan, Jasmin rice, and MORE chocolate.



Haiku (8/28/16)

Telescoping mop
Makes so clean my Subaru
Cute red Forester

Meant as a contrast between Allison's day and mine... although Allison did spend a lot of time cleaning today – and probably would have appreciated a telescoping mop!

August 28, 2016 – Arrowhead Lake to Bubbs Creek (10 miles, 2600 feet up, 2900 feet down)



Today's similar itinerary involved a steep and rocky climb up/down Glen Pass to near Charlotte Lake, followed by a short climb up/along Bubbs Creek. In my case, another dark storm pervaded Glen, making it my hardest and most frustrating pass. In contrast, Allison's weather was magnificent - Glen completely satisfying. There may have even been singing – "First Climb is the Steepest" (sung to Cat Stevens)! Indeed, it's amazing looking at her pictures because I feel like I was never there! Even so, she and I were in-synch all day – messaging in real time at the pass (at 11:30) and in camp. Despite different pass responses, we both savored this camp – doing laundry and even washing our hair! Food Porn: breakfast was tofu scramblers with kale, peppers, zucchini, and broccoli, lunch included crackers with pesto, sundried tomatoes, artichoke dip, and Parmesan plus cookies and fruit (passed around while teetering on big rocks along the lake below the pass); dinner featured rice and beans with sausage and peppers/cilantro/avocados, and peach or apple pie.



Left to Right: (top) Painted Lady, rubbly "First Climb is the Steepest", upper lakes basin, Allison on Glen; (bottom) descent to lake (I remember that!), big view over Charlotte (holy crap - I SWEAR I never saw this... head-down in weather?)



Haiku (8/29/16)
Rocks, rocks everywhere
Granite wall and quarry bowl
Awesome Forester!

August 29, 2016 – Bubbs Creek to Tyndall Creek (12.7 miles, 3400 feet up, 2700 feet down)



Today's similar itinerary involved a rocky climb up/down Forester Pass (highest point on the PCT), followed by long descent to Tyndall Creek. Although Allison appreciated the trail construction and engineering, she did not love Forester as much as me (Forester:Sarah and Glen:Allison). While some of that may have been due to her new issue (thigh-chafing!), she just didn't find Forester as beautiful and magnificent as I did. Allison was up at 6, on Forester at 10:30, at lunch at the pond below the pass at noon (where we messaged in real-time), and in camp by 4. Once settled in camp, she said it was a VERY long day and she was tired. Food Porn: breakfast was bagels with cream cheese, lox, and tomatoes, lunch included the healthy Elvis (flattened banana with almond or peanut butter sandwiches); dinner featured garlic shrimp linguini with corn salad, and Toblerone with candied mandarin oranges. Allison noted strongly that tonight's meal was her favorite on the whole trip! Incidentally, if you look closely, you can see the mules on Forester in the haiku picture!



Haiku (8/30/16)
When you get in shape
The trip is almost over
Savor the last days



August 30, 2016 – Tyndall Creek to Wallace Creek (5.2 miles, 860 feet up, 1200 feet down)



Today's similar itinerary involved a pleasant jaunt with vast scenery, including the Bighorn Plateau, our first view of Whitney, and the Great Western Divide. It should be noted that in 2004, Wallace was not part of the itinerary and we camped here by accident (after our mules ran away!). But Wallace Creek is SUCH a nice camp and you NEED this rest day!!! Allison easily made Wallace by 2, enjoying – like me – BATHING in the gentle creek. Food Porn: breakfast was breakfast burritos with plenty of fixin's, lunch included the fig-brie-prosciutto sandwiches (good lord – that's some serious porn!); dinner featured Marsala meatballs with Basmati rice, chutney, and naan, and dark chocolate truffles. Allison reported that one of her team-mates confessed that he had read/enjoyed my 2004 account – although he noted that I "mentioned my period a fair bit." This left me in stitches much of the evening!!!



Haiku (8/31/16)

Pop Tarts – O – Pop Tarts
Trans-fats take me all the way
To Whitney's summit!

For twice the cost, I added that I assumed Allison would get warmed chocolate-filled croissants!

August 31, 2016 – Wallace Creek to Guitar Lake (7.3 miles, 2000 feet up, 800 feet down)



Allison's departure from Wallace was marked by concerned messages to me about the surprise clouds that showed up – in combination with an even more serious cold front (freezing at 6 a.m.). In response, I provided regular weather/webcam updates several times throughout the day. In the end, things generally burnt off and stabilized. She arrived at Guitar at 2 and truly enjoyed sitting under Whitney watching the alpenglow. Food Porn: breakfast was savory lentils with leeks/scallions and miso soup, lunch included Norwegian flatbread with smoked salmon, cheese, and dill; dinner featured chili and quesadillas with gruyere, prosciutto, and pear (again: GOOD LORD that's some serious porn!), and chocolate-covered almonds.



Haiku (9/1/16)

Hitchcock Lakes reflects stars
Candlestick ridgeline windows
Alight with dawn hues



September 1, 2016 – Whitney Summit (10 miles, 3400 up/down) to Crabtree Meadows (3.3 miles, 270 up, 1400 down)



Ahhh – the Whitney Climb! Where we were up a 2 a.m. because of storms, Allison was on the trail by 4. They made the summit at 8 and we (Marshall, Sarah, and Sylvi) received real-time emails/photos/phonecalls. Despite surprise clouds yesterday, there were NO CLOUDS near Whitney all day (we got our usual big storm at noon). However, we had pleasant temperatures but Allison's climb and summit was freezing! She messaged from Guitar and once again from the lower Crabtree camp at 5:30. Food Porn: breakfast was expedition/fast cereal, lunch was expedition/fast salami, cheese, crackers, and chocolate-covered espresso beans; dinner featured an Asian-style broth with potsticker dumplings followed by chocolate cigar cookies and celebratory port (Warre's Warrior).



Left to Right: one of the windows along final ridgeline, Whitney ladies, trailcrest marmot, back at Crabtree – Whitney view



In lieu of Haiku (9/2/2016):

“Climb the mountains and get their good tidings. Nature’s peace will flow into you as sunshine flows into trees. The winds will blow their own freshness into you, and the storms their energy, while cares will drop off like autumn leaves.”

- John Muir, Our National Parks, 1901

September 2-3, 2016 – Crabtree to Rock Creek (11 miles, 2000 up/down), to Horseshoe (10.5 miles, 1600 up, 2100 Down)

In 2004, the only parties who had to exit via the 2-day Golden Trout Wilderness (not over Whitney) were those with stock. They have since expanded this rule to include other large-group/commercial backpackers. Allison’s Golden Trout days were very cold (freezing every morning) but the group dynamics were amazing; my final days were great/warm weather but the group dynamics boiled over into funky-land, thanks to a couple with no camping experience who should not have gone on our trip (see 2004 report). Both our parties HAULED ASS to the trailhead and were greeted with cold beers and chips/salsa... and both Allison and I relished our return to civilization. Food Porn: the first breakfast was savory polenta with tomatoes, basil and cheese, lunch was crackers with Boursin, olives, and figs; dinner featured cheese-y pasta with sausage followed by more cookies and port. The final breakfast was expedition/fast cereal because they started hiking at 6, making it out by 11.

<p>Sarah's Trip 2004</p> 	<p>Allison's Trip 2016</p> 	<p>Sarah's Closing Thoughts (9/18/16)</p> <p>Although I love MANY hikes, there are 3 that have seeped into my being – in part because they were so hard that I had to train for each upwards of a year in order to physically do them: Wonderland Trail (with John, 1994), MTS John Muir/Whitney (alone but guided, 2004), and Via Alpina/Bernese Alps (with Ellen, 2015). All are tremendously hard – climbing ~30K over at least 100 miles - and I feel proud and privileged to have completed each. Although I'd hoped to share the JMT/Whitney experience with Allison and Marshall this year, fate had other plans.</p> <p>Even though I didn't get to hike the JMT this summer, I felt or empathized with nearly all of Allison's responses to the experience because I have done the trip and, no matter what, it is an epic hike. That said, I was a little older, I was/am not married, and I chose to do the trip "alone" – so I did not suffer any feelings of homesickness. Although I was confident Allison would eventually find a sense of camaraderie (having myself bonded with the amazing Rob's Harem/Snail Team early on), I was truly happy that, by the end, Allison was only sad that the trip was ending, and that she readily declared this the best team she's ever traveled with.</p> <p>As a member of the first MTS-JMT, I commend MTS for clearly responding to the feedback they received from our group (and other early groups). First and foremost, there is no doubt they have increased the quality and quantity of the food – including taking to heart the recommendation to add another mule (i.e. cooler mule). Second, they have also increased the tent-size and responsibility (i.e. no more sharing). Third, it seems as though they have improved client screening in terms of making sure everyone has more serious camping experience and knows what they are getting into (that one of Allison's cohort found my 2004 report, I would like to think, is also very informative!). It is interesting to recall that when I first did the trip, it did not require DR approval for clients under 60; now, EVERYONE has to have such approval. Whether that is also influencing cohorts is an interesting question (that said, DR approval did not prevent plantar fasciitis, stress fracture, or the med-evac situation).</p>
<p>At or Near Mather Pass</p>		
		
<p>At Forester Pass</p>		
		
<p>At Bighorn Plateau – My Shot Shows First View of Whitney</p>		
		
<p>Whitney Summit – Sarong Portraiture</p>		



Whitney Summit – Our Peeps (in Allison's case – Team)



Horseshoe Trailhead Terminus – Our Teams



Departing Alpenglow on Whitney – Leaving Lone Pine

As noted, my 2004 cohort was older and larger – but all clients made it without major physical problems. But that is not to say there were not issues and challenges. My psychological low-point involved what turned out to be short-lived knee/ITB pain after descending LeConte (emotionally exacerbated by my raging period... did you read that, Jake!?) – vs. Allison's, at nearby Palisades, concerned a myriad of issues, including ankle pain and the med-evac situation. In 2004, Rob struggled with a multi-day sinus infection, guide Kelsey developed a sustained knee injury (causing him to forego Whitney), and Larry's crown fell off descending Pinchot (we never solved that). Meanwhile, our eldest pair (age 74 and 75) were the strongest, fastest and healthiest throughout the whole trip. That said, in both Allison and my team experiences, everyone did get stronger over time. Where I psyched myself out before climbing Whitney (but didn't have issues during the climb), Allison seemed more doubt-ridden during what she thought was a very slow and hard climb... which is hard for me to imagine because she always seems so strong when she hikes!

It is finally worth pointing out that MTS initially said they were only offering this trip as a one-time thing (in 2004). When our trip filled very quickly, they responded by trying to offer 3 more trips the next summer. Not surprisingly, MTS has since pulled back and are down to just one offering/summer – typically filling 9-12 months in advance. All I can say: that's probably wise because this is not a trip for everyone... but it is an AWESOME trip! I guess I will be in my 50's when I hopefully try again!

Allison's Closing Thoughts (9/18/16)

One more similarity Sarah failed to mention: Despite being the youngest, I usually hiked at the back of the pack (flying coach, team whistle pig). It's a nice place to hike! No rush, plenty of time to take pictures and look at the scenery, and proximity to snacks. ☺

My motivation for signing up for the JMT in 2016 was, in part, to hike the trail, but also to spend quality time with Sarah and Marshall. As noted at the start of the report, circumstances left me going on the trip alone. I thought about backing out, but I didn't know if and when I would be in good enough shape to do the trip in the future... and I didn't want to lose the money. The health/fitness aspect is something I think about often. I'm sure I have been impacted by seeing my dad and then Marshall's dad pass away younger than they expected. As Sarah wrote, it takes a lot of time and effort to train up for a trip like the JMT and I seem to get more foot aches and pains every year. I also thought it would be good to challenge myself to be a little more independent and self-reliant. (Yes, I see the humor in claiming to be "independent and self-reliant" while following guides along the trail, eating gourmet backcountry meals, and essentially glamping as much as is possible in the wilderness! Those terms are relative, I suppose.)

Going on a trip like this without my usual emotional support network meant coping with the challenges of the trip on my own. (It was nice to have the DeLorme messenger, effectively my comfort blanket.) I am proud of myself for persevering, especially through a few challenging days early in the trip. Those days were characterized by storms, sleep deprivation, new aches and pains, homesickness, lady problems, and unexpected events. I had to will myself forward with the hope that I would feel better the next day. Luckily I did, thanks to new friendships, jokes, thoughtful gestures, encouraging notes of support from friends and family back home, sleep, coffee, and ibuprofen. I found comfort in developing new routines and daily rituals, such as the nightly handwashing protocol and lotion regimen. I even flossed daily! There is a pleasure in living simply with a tent, a pad, and a bag of smelly clothes, spending days walking the trail and evenings relaxing in camp. Even during the challenging days and emotional lows, I loved the hiking and the scenery of the JMT. It was truly incredible and awe-inspiring.

Ultimately, the JMT trip has been one of the best experiences of my life. The start and finish of the trip were both emotional for me. I was sad to go, then I was sad to leave. I will look back on the trip and remember the beautiful Sierras as well as the wonderful people I traveled with. I am already looking forward to when I can return to the Sierras – there's so much more to explore.



Amusing stat's from Allison's trip compiled by guides (e.g. 22 lbs of coffee consumed)... followed by some food porn (sadly, Allison took very few pictures of the food – where I would have gone nuts taking food portraits every night!)