

IN MY PACK

(SNACK)

The problem with Justin's Nut Butters is that I can't eat just one. Or maybe that isn't such a problem, because these smooth treats are a healthy, protein-packed, and delicious alternative to sugar-rich bars and gels. Suck the 190-calorie spread straight from the packet, or slather it on a bagel. Choose from six flavors; my favorite is Maple Almond. \$6 to \$9.50 for 10 packets; justinsnutbutter.com



(HIKER JEWELRY)

For our Mt. Whitney climb last spring, Sky George of Tarma Designs created this special-edition commemorative necklace. Made from recycled stainless steel, it's now available to the general public, along with a variety of other necklaces, earrings, and pendants. Everything in the line has an outdoor-inspired design (read: cool for guys), and \$1 from every model in the new Appalachian Trail Series supports volunteer work on the AT. Can you say stocking stuffer? \$25; tarmadesigns.com



DOWNLOAD THIS HIKE

TRACING THE HEIGHTS of the Sierra, a range blessed with North America's finest weather and prettiest sunsets, the John Muir Trail belongs on every hiker's life list. Beginning on page 69, Northwest editor Michael Lanza will show you how to enjoy this classic in ultralight style. Then, when you're ready to start planning your own JMT thru-hike, surf over to backpacker.com/hikes to view more photos, read trip details, and preview the route with a Google Earth flyover. You can even download our blow-by-blow track log to your GPS.



A Splendid Failure

HOW TO GO HOME EMPTY-HANDED—AND BLISSFULLY HAPPY

MAYBE YOU'VE HAD A TRIP LIKE THIS, an expedition that didn't pan out like it was supposed to—but turned into something more rewarding because of the partners you picked. That happened to me last spring on Mt. Whitney.

I'd recruited seven guys to join me on a fundraising climb for Big City Mountaineers, a nonprofit that provides wilderness mentoring for urban teens. Tom, my old boss and a busy media executive, had trained for months on a Stairmaster. James, a friend since fourth grade, had climbed the 33 floors in his Manhattan apartment building. Eric, the publisher of *Field & Stream* and *Outdoor Life* (and formerly *BACKPACKER*), had torn himself away from his very pregnant wife. We were fit, focused, and eager to make the most of our days off.

It snowed nearly the whole time. It snowed the way you wished it did on Christmas—big flakes falling so fast our footprints disappeared in the time it took to visit the loo. We finally hunkered down at 12,000 feet, peering up at avalanche chutes loaded with a foot, two feet, three feet of unstable cement.

On summit night, Kurt, our guide, couldn't sleep. The owner of Sierra Mountaineering International, he donates a dozen trips a season, and he likes to get his climbers to the top. But the risk was too high. He called it off at 6 a.m.

There's a defining moment on trips that fall short—a point where the vibe either crumbles or a new one emerges. For us, it was inevitable that things would stay positive. We'd raised \$38,275, enough to put 75 kids and 75 mentors on the trail for eight days.

And we had Fran, the publisher of *National Geographic Adventure*, who gleefully somersaulted down the trail, reminding us that mountains have many ways of imparting joy. It's a lesson I'll hold close when—same good cause, more good friends—I try again next year.

CLIMB HIGH, HELP KIDS

It's a sweet deal: You raise a few grand, get a ton of gear, and summit one of America's classic peaks with an expert guide. Bonus: Your donation provides a life-changing experience for at-risk teens. Sign up for a 2008 climb (or donate to mine) at summitforsomeone.org.

Jonathan Dorn
Editor-in-Chief

PHOTOS BY (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT) JONATHAN DORN; MICHAEL LANZA; MORGAN MILLER / DE FRISCO STUDIO