

# Sierra High Route

## Facts and Take-Aways

3-7 AUGUST 2020

I'm sharing some dry<sup>1</sup> facts and practical take-aways from my solo unsupported South-to-North traverse across the Sierra Nevada Mountain Range, following Roper's Sierra High Route (SHR). This is written especially for someone developing an intent to complete this route in under 4 days<sup>2</sup>, but also for a generic audience.

### Timeframes.

- Embarked at 4:31am on Monday 3 August 2020 at Copper Creek trailhead.
- Followed Roper's Sierra High Route (according to Roper's book).
- Traveled about 198 miles, about 1.75 of which were off route.
- Disembarked at 8:07am on Friday 7 August 2020 at Twin Lakes.
- Slept four times:
  - (1) 4.5 hours (9:30pm–2:00am) just North of Le Conte Ranger Station;
  - (2) 3.5 hours (10:30pm–2:00am) just South of Laurel Lake;
  - (3) 3 hours (11:30pm–2:30am) just East of Twin Island Lakes;
  - (4) 3.25 hours (1:30am–4:45am) at pass between Stanton and Virginia Peaks.
- Rested 11 times for more than 2 minutes, sometimes to memorize an upcoming route-finding section while enjoying views and sometimes to manage layers while consuming water. These rests occupied a total of about 115 minutes. 3 of these rests were while chatting with other parties on the SHR; 1 of these rests was with my parents in Tuolumne Meadows.
- Each night and morning, I underwent some meditative exercises designed for memorizing the upcoming route, organizing joy, and compartmentalizing discomfort. These sessions occupied a total of about 60 minutes.

The outing lasted 99 hours 36 minutes.

### Environmental variables.

- Sunrise was 6:04am; sunset was 8:09pm.
- Skies were clear but for the afternoon of the 4th day, which witnessed about 20% cumulous cloud cover.
- Winds grew to about  $20 \frac{\text{miles}}{\text{hour}}$ , with about  $28 \frac{\text{miles}}{\text{hour}}$  gusts, in the 3<sup>rd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> evenings.
- Temperatures at 10,000 feet ranged within 65-75F while light, and 35-50F while dark
- Dew point at night was 40F; it collected above 9,500 feet, especially near flowing water.
- Frost visible in early mornings on grasses among flowing snowmelt above 10,500 feet.
- Travel on frozen water was necessary in 2 small stretches:
  - 100 feet of snow just NorthWest of Lake Catherine;
  - 250 feet of permanent ice just North of the pass East of Matterhorn Peak.

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<sup>1</sup>Contact me if you'd like a more impressionistic account of my experience.

<sup>2</sup>By improving my strategy, I'm certain an equivalent effort could offer a traverse of the SHR in under 4 days. I'd be enthusiastic to work anybody somebody with that intent – contact me if you're interested.

- Forging water was necessary in 2 places:
  - Mono Creek;
  - Twin Islands Lakes (the North one).
- Along the John Muir Trail (JMT), I encountered a hiking party about every 15 minutes. On trail but off the JMT and not in the vicinity of Tioga Pass, I encountered 7 hiking parties, and about 10 camping parties. Off trail, I encountered 4 hiking parties, 2 of which were traveling the SHR (both South-to-North).
- I noticed some fine creatures along the SHR<sup>3</sup>:
  - 5 x fresh black bear scat, 3 which were in the climb from Copper Creek trailhead;
  - a score of deer; a couple scores of rodents (mostly marmots), several pikas, a few moles; a few scores of ravens, 2 bald eagles, 2 falcons, 5 hawks.

**Important skills** for safely completing this route as a  $\sim 4$  day effort.

- Maintaining a Flow-State while interacting with gear and making decisions about route, inward & outward focus, strategy and effort-level, hydration, and nutrition.
- Experience managing nausea, such as by keeping spirits up and by modifying breathing, effort, hydration, and consuming certain elements of nutrition.
- Competence quickly matching topographic features to a topographical map, compass reading, or GPS reading, then making route-finding decisions.
- Efficient mistake-less boulder-hopping.
- Efficient brisk prolonged running along trails.
- Capacity and confidence to make clear-minded decisions while sleep-deprived.
- Capacity and confidence to push boundaries of will and commitment in remote wilderness (without support of any sort), while remaining cognizant and trusting risk-assessment & decision-making.

**Injuries** (all minor).

- 5 blistered toes: 3 developed into open wounds 100 miles in, 1 severely so.
- Thoroughly bruised pads-o-feet, from boulder-hopping.
- Bruised and scraped shins, knees, ankles from talus and scree fields.
- Tattered skin on fingers and hands from scrambling on granite.
- Chapped lips.
- Acutely aching hips and knees (only felt when trying to sleep).
- Mild kidney injury: post-effort swelling in face, neck, eyes, feet, ankles, calves, hands; peeing issues; trouble sleeping; mild confusion.

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<sup>3</sup>Generally, this route felt rather lonely in the way of non-human animals.

## Gear.

	Item	Use	Remarks, such as quantity carried	
<b>Primary layer</b>	Shoes	entire	trail-running, w/ laces, w/o rock plate	
	Socks	entire	vegan, high-ankle	
	Shorts	entire	tie-top, 5 pockets (4 open, 1 zipper)	
	Shirt	entire	long sleeve, w/ collar	
	Sweat bands	entire	2, on wrists	
	Watch	entire	in chest pouch, w/o band	
	Visor	entire		
	Pack	entire	15 liters, chest pouches	
	Waist belt	entire	4 pouches, fastens poles	
		Poles	20%	collapsible, hand-straps, tiny baskets
<b>Secondary layer</b>	Jacket	20%	vegan, nordic skiing design	
	Wind breaker	15%		
	Mittens	10%	inner glove, water-resistant, wind-resistant	
	Glasses	35%	glacier-glasses	
<b>Essential equipment</b>	Water storage	entire	2 x .5 liter soft-flask	
	Filter	entire	screw onto flask	
	Sleeping bag	4 times	vegan	
	Sleeping pad	3 times	3/4-length, inflatable	
	Space blanket	4 times	6'x8'	
	Primary headlamp	20%	up to 750 lumen	
	Maps & profile	entire	24 annotated colored topo, double-sided 6"x10" thin plastic	
	GPS device	entire	10-minute satellite-tracking pings sent once per hour, 25 2-way text-messages, emergency rescue button	
	<b>Auxiliary equipment</b>	3 stuff sacks	entire	each with cinch tie
		Chap stick	15 times	spf 15
Straw		2 times	silicon, 6 inches	
Secondary headlamp		0	tiny, single AA battery	
Batteries		50%	1 x AA battery for secondary headlamp, 3 x rechargeable batteries for primary headlamp	
Buff		30%		
Cloth strip		40%	1/6 long pillow case	
Duct tape		0	wrapped on poles	
Compass		entire	tiny	
Lighter		0	half-sized	
Safety pins		0	8	
Toilet paper		4 times	tightly-rolled	
Plastic bags		2	6 x doggie bags	
Rubber band		0		
Face mask		0	... COVID ...	
ID, Cash, Permit, Debit card		0	Driver's License, 10 x \$20 bill, 8"x5" page, -	
<b>Consumables</b>		Gels	6,000 calories	30 gels @ 250 cal/gel, mostly coconut oil & rice syrup
	Bars	6,000 calories	30 bars @ 275 cal/bar: 15 w/ 20g vegan protein, 15 of nut fat	
	Protein powder	50g protein	60g protein	
	Nuts	1,000 calories	1,000 calories, salted almonds	
	Granola	1,200 calories	1,500 calories, mostly roasted oats	
	Pain relief	6 pills	30 x 200mg pills Tylenol	
	Caffeine	3 pills	10 x 200mg pills	
	Nausea relief	0	8 x Zantac	
	Electrolytes	98 pills	120 x salt+magnesium pills	

**How gear was worn.**

- Body:** – Visor & glacier glasses, (often) strip of cloth under visor covering neck; long-sleeve shirt, shorts, socks, shoes;  
 – Wrist-band on each wrist: one fastened a day’s worth of folded maps against arm, the other fastened the compass.

**Shorts:** In pockets were about 4,000 calories of gels.

- Waist belt:** – In 3 waist belt pockets were about 2,000 calories of bars, nuts, and granola;  
 – In 1 waist belt pocket was the GPS unit and a slip of plastic on which was printed an annotated profile of the route;  
 – Fastened to the outside of the waist belt were 2 collapsable trekking poles each with some wraps of duct-tape at its center-o-mass.

**Pack:** At time of embark, my pack weighed 9.5 pounds, including a liter of water.

- Chest pouches.
  - \* Watch, toilet paper with extra doggie bags wrapped in rubber band, buff, chapstick, straw, trash, both flasks;
  - \* A day’s worth of electrolyte tablets and other pills.
- Main compartment.
  - \* In a stuff-sack: sleeping bag, sleeping pad, space blanket.
  - \* In a small stuff-sack: mittens, jacket .
  - \* In a mesh sack: headlamps, batteries, safety pins, lighter, more electrolyte tablets and other pills.
  - \* Remainder of food, including protein powder in a doggie bag.
- Inner pouch.
  - \* Face mask.
  - \* ID, Permit, Cash, Debit Card.
- Inner sleeve.
  - \* Maps.
- Cinched to the outside: wind breaker, the strip of cloth, a little banner reading “you are so beautiful” .

**Comments about gear.**

- + I’d bring an extra battery for charging the GPS device. Not having one seeded some ongoing stress and reluctance to use it. Relieving this stress could be worth the weight. Such a battery could replace one of the primary headlamp’s extra batteries.
- +/- I’d consider bringing tougher gloves instead of, or in addition to, the mittens – I’d use’em for sparing my hands from getting torn up from scrambling.
- I’d bring exactly one pole, not two. Indeed, while the weight of each pole is small, fastening two poles is nearly twice as cumbersome as fastening one, not to mention two jostle about more than does one. <sup>4</sup>
- I’d consider bringing a lesser sleeping pad: shorter and thinner.

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<sup>4</sup>Even though one of my poles broke, I think the chances of this are slim enough to risk having no pole for the benefit of not bringing two. Indeed, I’d bet my pole broke because of how much I’ve used it in its collapsed form to pick across snowfields.

- I was happy with how the waist belt relieved some weight from my shoulders, as well as relieved need to remove the pack during each day.
- I was happy about the ample battery-life for headlamps.
- I was happy with the space blanket in place of a tarp or bivvy set-up.
  - For the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> nights, the space blanket was folded in half and used as a ground tarp to protect the inflatable sleeping pad.
  - For the 3<sup>rd</sup> night, I taco'd myself in the space blanket: part of it was under the sleeping pad; part of it was wrapped over me in the sleeping bag; 3 rocks were used to hold the space blanket's flailing ends down.
  - For the 4<sup>th</sup> night, I just passed out in a cave, and eventually strewed my sleeping bag around me, then later the space blanket. I didn't use the sleeping pad.
- All around, I was happy with this gear, and generally felt light and compact enough to run and boulder-hop briskly without distraction.
- The doggie bags were for collecting my used toilet paper, and to wrap my feet or hands for a wet-suit effect if raining. The rubber band held the doggie bags together. The safety pins were for repairing tears. The lighter was in case of emergency. The duct tape was for blisters or tears. The straw was for drinking snowmelt. (I think the function of the rest of the gear is self-evident.)

## MORE PERSONAL FACTS AND PERSPECTIVES

### Preparations for this effort.

- By unextroinary chance, my late-childhood involved relatively ample scrambling on open rock, route-finding, and fasting in remote autonomous environments. Undoubtedly, these practices have segued into actionable skills for quickly traversing the SHR.
- Prior to this traverse of the SHR, I had about 100 x 1+ day episodes in the Sierras, my first being in the Fall of 2004; about 40% of which involved skis. About 35% of the SHR was entirely new to me, mostly Southern portions.
- Starting in 2015, I've practiced competitive mountain running, and framed most of my non-working time around such in Springs–Summers. I've learned a modest amount through direct experiences racing, talking with other athletes, and reading a handful of books and articles on endurance running (concerning physiology, diet, and/or training). But mostly, these past several years have lent to developing strategies for leveraging will and confidence in certain effort-zones at understood time-til-finished.
- In September 2019, I traversed the Wind River Range (along Skurka's Wind River High Route (WRHR)) with an intention similar to my intention for the SHR. I expected the WRHR to be wilder and effortful: the first marathon of it was post-holing through feet of fresh snow, sometimes atop glaciers; other sections followed elk routes. Meanwhile the Sierras are laden with people and well-maintained trails and essentially no glacier travel.<sup>5</sup> This perspective, together with my take-aways from the WRHR, were critical for supplying me with confidence in my approach to the SHR.
- In December 2019, I started working through Steve Roper's book, which defines the SHR. It was a pleasure to do this: it felt like I was interacting with an amalgamated personality of some friends a generation older than me who've accrued "outdoors-person" identities. Roper's writing displays apparent reverence for place, and a type of (innocent) freedom of travel in seemingly autonomous environments. It also overtly displays an etiquette surrounding being in, and coming away from, the High Sierras – I am happy to uphold and honor this etiquette. In this spirit, I created a map set by working through Roper's descriptions, augmented by some discussions with people familiar with the vicinities, and not using a pre-existing GPS file.
- Prior to my completion of the SHR, the FKT for the SHR was held by Leor Pantilat. Some immediate internet searching of Pantilat reveals that he is very accomplished as a competitive trail runner, and very competent in remote mountainous environments. Pantilat's blog reveals an authentic enthusiasm for exploration of such environments;

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<sup>5</sup>For a slick comparison between my experiences along the WRHR, and the SHR, check out "Spectre" by John Oswald, and "Anthem of the Great Spirit: Half Wolf Dances Mad in Moonlight" by Terry Riley, respectively. (Both are performed by Kronos Quartet.)

also, he has an eye for snapping superb photos. It's through this context that I scrutinized Pantilat's trip report of the SHR, which heartedly reflects the specialness of this route.

Hardly as accomplished a trail runner, and hardly as familiar with the High Sierras, I wasn't sure how to compare Pantilat's effort and timeframe with my ambitions. While he reports "no drama" (except a faulty zipper on his sleeping bag and a lack of chap stick), I was confident any effort I'd undergo would be "total drama", or at least it would feel that way to me. Also, while Pantilat's report speaks at length about some of the amazing spots he cruised through, and some about the gear and nutrition he brought, he speaks little of his effort-arc and timetables. He also explains that attaining an FKT was not his priority, and this is certainly reflected by the emphases of his trip report.

Pantilat's comments about his and Ricky Gates' (full) Lost Coast FKT (13 hours 47 minutes) struck me as similar to his SHR trip report: a continuous effort, yet mostly focused on the experience. As I was working in the Bay Area January - May 2020, I calibrated my expectations for the SHR by traversing the (full) Lost Coast at an efficient and brisk yet comfortable effort (solo and unsupported). I completed it in 10 hours 45 minutes: 3 hours faster than Pantilat & Gates. For me, this calibration was key for setting realistic timeframe goals for the SHR.

I'm grateful to Pantilat for both his literal SHR trip report, and its spirit, as well as for sharing his FKT publicly (sans GPS file). These elements were perhaps the strongest anchors for my imagination around this superb route. I'm certain that Pantilat, or any number of athletes, could easily complete this route in under 4 days, should they have the interest and ambition.

- I improved my understanding of digestion, functions of certain elements of nutrition, and how sleep is believed to effect one's physiology and cognition. These investigations often quickly became over my head, or revealed our society's lack of understanding thereof. Regardless, I was only hoping for a mental model<sup>6</sup> that I could reference for making decisions with confidence while along the SHR.

## Goals.

- My foremost goal was to undergo a potent experience along this special route. To me this meant the following.

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<sup>6</sup>Indeed, my experiences with effortful foot-travel reveal that trivializing sources of stress, usually which arise around making decisions and having confidence in them, is profoundly helpful in sustaining will and focus. For me, accumulating mental models of how a variety of relevant systems work is an easy and reliable way to undergo such trivialization. Even if a mental model is faulty, or based on incorrect logic or facts, the confidence it supplies in my decisions is powerful and functionally adequate.

- I’d travel efficiently and lightly at a willful yet good and controlled pace and tempo.<sup>7</sup>
  - I’d accommodate time and cognitive & emotional space for sensitive inward & outward observations. For instance, I’d pause as I pleased to feel the place and my reactions to it; I’d pursue inspiration for exploration of one type or another.
- Timeframe goals.<sup>8</sup>
    - 4 days.
    - 100 hours.
    - 4 days 16 hours 21 minutes (the previous FKT).
    - 5 days.
    - Bail. I brought enough calories for 120 hours, and no more. Were I not going to complete the route in under 5 days, my intention was to bail.

Accompanying each of these timeframe goals was an array of possible spots to sleep, and sleep intervals.<sup>9</sup>

**Training, diet, sleep.** My training for this was rather unorganized, compared to training I’ve undergone for a season of trail races. I’d estimate I ran an average of 75 miles per week starting in January 2020: at least 90 minutes per day 6 days per week, about 75% on trails, and 25% on roads; come May 2020, these ratios became 65% on trails, 30% off trails, 5% on roads. Nearly all of these runs involved as much vertical as I could find (I never bothered to measure the vert). About once per week, one of these runs would be a

- tempo: 3 x (20+ minutes on & 5+ minutes off);
- hill-repeat: total of 60+ minutes up;
- long run: 150+ minutes;
- scramble along a ridge (from May 2020 onward).

January – May 2020, this running was at elevation less than 1,000 feet. May – July 2020, this running was between 5,000 and 10,000 feet. I never peaked my running training. About 7 times this season leading up to the SHR, I put in a 10+ hour effort. These efforts always involved ample off-trail travel.

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<sup>7</sup>I’ve come to believe that it’s unsafe to be overly preoccupied by timeframes for efforts like the SHR, for that could lead to confused risk-assessment (especially at night), inefficient route-finding decisions, mistakes while boulder-hopping and scrambling, tripping while running, and unpracticed nutrition and effort zones that could result in unfamiliar emotional crashes. Also, I’ve found that being overly preoccupied by speed can reduce the otherwise full and holistic experience to a single thin parameter: time. Similar efforts have revealed to me that overall richness of peak experiences is surest when traveling according to feel, almost ignorant to absolute timeframes, while trusting that my previous experiences, practice, and training will safely take me to completion with full personal reward. Should that completion be within a target timeframe: what a bonus.

<sup>8</sup>I honestly didn’t have a good sense of how ambitious any of these timeframes were. Talking with friends who’d traveled the SHR lent an impression that averaging 50 miles per day was way too ambitious. This was amplified by considering Pantilat’s “no drama” FKT. So 4 days seemed exorbitantly ambitious. I now know 4 days is entirely realistic.

<sup>9</sup>My 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> nights were not according to any of these plans.

From January 2020 onward, I started eating nuts, and generally more fat, than in previous seasons. From March 2020 onward, I ate one meal per day about 3 days per week, and two per day the other days of the week. Immediately after a run, I'd consume 30+grams of vegan protein. Generally, I'd try to consume about 100 grams of vegan protein per day from January 2020 onward.

From January 2020 onward, I slept about 6.5 hours per night. I'd typically do a workout of some sort in mornings, through as the season progressed I distributed workouts across different times in the day.

**Support.** Though officially “unsupported”, I feel overwhelming support surrounding this effort.

- For most of my life, I've had the privilege of receiving ongoing love from family and a network of friends.
- My personal and professional community is graciously supportive of me seeking and undergoing peak experiences, such as willfully traversing the SHR, private and unsharable as the product tends to be. Sometimes, this support takes the form of celebrating these experiences with me. Sometimes it takes the form of demonstrating an interest in me sharing the experience in some way. Knowing I'll share such experiences post-effort, especially with specific people, fuels my own real-time engagement and commitment during the effort – I find this feedback system to be beautiful and profoundly helpful, if not necessary, for leveraging will. This support also takes the form of family, friends, and collaborators doing favors for me (such as spending half a day driving me somewhere), preparing beautiful or indulgent particular foods for me, and allowing me time and space and generally being flexible. (In particular, for years my parents and Ana, and more recently Emily, have given me all of these modes of support.)
- Beyond this direct support, I feel supported by this particular slice of extended community, through which emerges this particular slice of culture. Sometimes overtly and sometimes immeasurably, it is through this culture that activities such as willful traverses along the SHR are endowed with value. I believe it's through this culture that the SHR is conjured and continues to exist in enough imaginations that it holds its spirit and garners reverence.

**Strong moments.** Among the stream of varied and strong moments, here are a few notable ones, which I hope represent my experience along the SHR.

- Lake Miriam was bewildering, and fully stunning. It was hard for me to peel my attention from it. It felt like a gift to be there.
- Joy and delight summarized my encounters with people on the JMT. The JMT is a national treasure; I was so happy to see people on it: it offers a relatively controlled experience for many who otherwise might never access such stark and remote high

country. It made me happy to see it being used and appreciated so.

- An order of magnitude more joy and delight dominated my encounters with others traversing the SHR. We'd smile, and grin bigger still, and exchange senseless enthusiasm before parting ways a few minutes later. My spirit would continue resonating high for an hour after these few encounters.
- Sunrise near Muir Pass was silent and windless – even-scale lighting, slow, and empty.
- The bushwhack side-hilling just North of Evolution Lake demoralized me. I was indecisive in the way of route-finding: I'd err on gaining elevation when doing so seemed available, as if to cash out later, only to discover I'd have to bushwhack back down a blocky scrubby pitch. I ran out of water for about 90 minutes across this stretch. Generally, I operated with no semblance of a Flow-State: every step and every glance was an effortful decision.
- A pole broke in Humphrey's Basin. This distracted my focus for about 20 minutes. It took a while for me to understand that it was not my leg, or arm, or happiness, that broke, but a pole. Then it took me a while to figure what, exactly, about the pole failed, and that I could not fix it. This episode was an opportunity for me to assess my general cognition, and notice opportunities for me to manipulate my mind and conjure will. I manipulated my will so and poured my soul over Puppet pass like cascading lava might.<sup>10</sup> (This transaction of perception and thought exemplifies the type of cognition I'd experience in a Flow-State.)
- The pass between La Salle Lake and Bearpaw Lake was delightful: open granite, then blocky talus, just below a close horizon of granite spears. It was arresting: like slamming  $\frac{2}{3}$ -can of carbonated water.
- Sunset on the smoothly glaciated Mills Creek was sparkly and orange. I felt carried by foreseeable gentle comfort.
- Laurel Creek in moonlight offered a sense of geographically unbounded safety. Though squarely alone, my mind and body carried heritage of my ancestry: in genetic code, physical form, innate cognition and deciphering of perception into recognizable memes; an education from a society and civilization with a terrifying defensiveness and tenacity to survive and out-compete; most beautiful and frightening of all was how this ancestry could effectively communicate actively with me through swells of competing emotions: sometimes it felt like my ancestors privately screaming at me from a perspective before the support of a technological society. My very being, as

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<sup>10</sup>A sharp fellow with a white well-trimmed beard wearing khakis was sort of waiting for me at the Northwest side of the pass. He said something like “seeing you was like seeing a shooting star: it fully arrested my attention as I watched in bewilderment, postponing my comprehension of what I was looking at. You must be Leor.” We then exchanged a few sentences in tribute to Leor: the imagination Leor anchors through his photos, spectacular routes, and ambitious enthusiasm.

a currier of this culmination of civilization, felt adequate for managing any scenario with confidence.

Following the moon over Laurel Pass was dark, still, tender, and gracious.

- The region just South of Minaret Lake was an elixir of vitality. I came across a deer with its unnoticing ass pointed toward me as it drank from a moss-rimmed flow of snowmelt. As I observed in stillness, it sensed my presence and we glared at each other from 6 feet apart. It blinked at me as water drooled from its chops, then it bent down to resumed drinking. I was appalled and saddened: it's lack of fear reflected a genetic and epigenetic population void of predation for generations: human destruction of ecological complexity and autonomy. In recent years, this shade of human ugliness tints just about everything my eyes land on. As I acknowledged this, with deliberateness I shifted this tint: through the deer, I became vicariously happy. Like the lives of most members of my communities, it was free of fear for its life, relieved of at least that certain type of suffering. It now has some opportunity to use its nature to pursue other modes of living. In this way, the deer and I were akin in our privilege and security; I was happy through it, and for it. This shift exemplifies a general theme of my experience along the SHR.

The grasses were brilliant green and tall; flowers were blooming with pollinators zip-ping about. The lakes to follow were intricate and idyllic.

- The section from Thousand Islands Lake past Lake Catherine and Twin Island Lakes to Blue Lakes was, by far, the most magical and psychedelic section for me.
- I felt very strong climbing up toward Vogelsang Pass, as if I was strolling through Manhattan wearing shades and sharp clothes with a fist gripping a couple shots of espresso in a paper cup and a credit card in my pocket: nothing could touch me; my desires aligned with what my environment desired of me. Generally, I felt quite strong on all trail sections (except along Gaylor Trail), especially through sustained ascents.
- Seeing a friend and my parents in Tuolumne Meadows erupted cathartic sobbing, which felt great!
- An onset of nausea – the most severe of my excursion – struck me near Gaylor Peak. A half-mile later I set a timer to lay down for 10 minutes. The nausea persisted as I inefficiently bumbled toward Alpine Lake. Once there, I discovered I was off route, and sank into an impossible emotional trench of immovability and mortality. I lifted my heavy body from there, though my soul dragged with tacky reluctance. I found myself Class 4+ traversing from Alpine Lake to a critical pass about a mile away. Once finally at the pass, I meditated on my nausea, and isolated an assortment of sources of stress, discomforts, and pains. About 10 minutes of such work relieved me of all such stresses. With stunning speed and exactness, I traversed the entirely off-trail stretch from there to Shepherd Crest by sunset, then with continued speed

and exactness across an old moraine to Shepherd Lake.

- Ascending from Return Creek to Soldier Lake was yellow, moonlit, and magical. By this point it was clear that completing the route in under 4 days wasn't gonna happen.
- My cognition splintered some as I approached the pass between Stanton and Virginia Peaks: my perception of the granite on which I was scrambling, which was the subject of my intense attention, filled a 5-dimensional visual field of gently evolving granite color-texture. That windy moonscape felt calm, lovely, and safe. Once at the pass, the moonlight wasn't available to assist navigation. Cliffed out, I searched for another route. Implementing a sort of 'self-assessment' rule revealed that I wasn't in a state to trust my risk-assessment, so I elected to not proceed until light. Once that decision was made, I was asleep immediately. A bit into sleeping, I crawled into a tiny cave to sleep; a bit into that, I carelessly yanked the sleeping bag over me; then likewise the space blanket. Once barely light, I resumed with lightness and haste: completing the SHR 3 hours later.
- As I arrived in Twin Lakes' RV conglomerate, I wanted to find my parents for more cathartic sobbing – I wanted this, the emotional comfort blanket only they could offer, so badly that I was single-minded about finding them. I found myself continuing to run along the road along Twin Lakes, as if toward them. Eventually, I tired of jogging, and attempted to hitch a ride, in either direction. The first vehicle to stop for me was my Dad's. In that moment, the neatly organized yet sparse elements of will and self that I was holding actionable dismantled and escaped. The window for cathartic sobbing was eclipsed by access to salt and fat. I enjoyed an indulgent 3,000 calorie picnic in the morning sun on the grassy beach of Twin Lakes with my parents.

**Etiquette.** The SHR is very special: it's stark, rugged, idilic and iconic; it's remote, and necessitates observation and route-finding; it's lonely and relatively untraveled; it's long and (for the most part) natural, aesthetic, and thoughtfully construed. Perhaps set by Roper's book, an etiquette surrounds the SHR that I cherish and hope remains, if not spreads, to other vicinities in North America. In the way of an overall outdoors experience, I believe the following are retained by upholding this etiquette:

- (1) sense of exploration, route-finding, adventure;
  - sense of solitude, and personal connection to a place;
  - practice of open observation of a place, and one's self;
  - frequency and innocence of exposure to flora and fauna.

I'd summarize this etiquette as 'leave no trace' in every interpretation of the phrase.

- **Literal.** There was no trash, hardly any unthoughtful foot-travel or blatant camps, and generally few signs of human activity (when off trail). Flora and fauna (that isn't extinct) live relatively unimpacted by unregulated human traffic.

While I'm a strong proponent of wagbags in the Sierras, I did not use them. Instead, I buried my poop mindfully: far away from a trail or a body of water, at least 6 inches

into dirt. I carried my used toilet paper out. I treaded lightly; slept unintrusively; traveled quietly, generally giving space for, and not disturbing, other creatures in the vicinity. I generally matched the demeanor of people I'd encounter.

- **Virtual.** There are relatively few play-by-play accounts of the SHR that are quickly searchable on the internet. For that matter, an accurate GPS file is hard to come by; I understand that there is an array of interpretations of Roper's book anyway.

While I carried a GPS tracker with me, which logged a location every 10 minutes (while awake), it is not available on the internet.

- **Imagination.** I believe the lack of virtual litter along the SHR purges it of 'anticipated and predictable experience', leaving those who travel the SHR to experience it in their own, perhaps original, way. In particular, I believe this lack keeps Imagination around the SHR from being projected onto a few experience-types or a few measures.

I'm profusely grateful that this fantastic route is presently unappropriated by social-media: I hope such appropriation remains limited to routes that already capture public imagination, and that remote routes remain unappropriated so.<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile, I recognize that posting this FKT of the SHR directly projects my, and surely others', imagination generated around the SHR onto a single measure: time. Approaching the SHR preoccupied by this single measure, as I did in part, is firmly a missed opportunity, and feels embarrassingly contrived. The SHR is so aesthetic, fantastical, intricately nuanced in geology and delicate ecology, vast, and varied, that I believe a fuller, longer-resonating, experience could be achieved by a "fast-pack" approach – on the order of 8+ days. I remain tantalized and unfulfilled by so much of the SHR that I knowingly ignored in-route. The context in which an FKT attempt makes the most sense to me is for an additional degree of adventure after acquiring acquaintance with essentially the entire vicinity.<sup>12</sup> I hope the nature of this trip report mitigates

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<sup>11</sup>**On publicly posting remote routes on social media.** Through a couple direct experiences, but mostly just a general sense, I believe that publicly posting remote routes on social media, permanently as it tends to be, risks unimaginable impacts on a place, which in particular tend to negate each of the lines (1) above. I've asked friends in this mountain-travel community "Why do you post remote routes publicly on social media?" I'm grateful for their honest and coherent responses, which identify a few priorities. My general reaction is

(11) "Well, that's certainly an important priority, but don't you feel it's trivialized as self-serving against the potentiality of unimaginable impact from (essentially permanently) posting a remote route?"

I'd categorize their responses as follows.

It's a way to (non-exclusively) share, and be a part of a larger (non-exclusive) community.

**My reaction.** I challenge the notion that we're starved of remote routes: they're always available, they just take a bit of committed (virtual or physical) exploration. I believe that, for many without the means to undergo such exploration, strong outdoors experiences can be accrued through better-known routes that are shared through whatever public means. Sure it's exclusive to not be forthcoming about remote routes, but (11).

It's a useful tool for setting goals, motivating, and training.

**My reaction.** I challenge the suggestion that remote routes, versus well-established routes, are necessary for this. In any case, again, (11).

It's a device to for self-promotion: to amplify and foster ego. It feels good to be seen, and to impress others.

**My reaction.** I certainly relate to this. But, again, (11).

It's a free country: nobody can tell me not to. Anyways, it's not my responsibility to avert a social trend, even if I am not on board with it. Besides, everybody else is using it (and I don't want to be left behind).

<sup>12</sup>I'm paraphrasing Andrew Skurka here.

this effect of reducing an SHR experience to its timeframe.

**Suggested practices** for myself, should I intend to complete the SHR (South-to-North) in under 4 days.<sup>13</sup>

**!!!!** Travel as much of this route as possible in a Flow-State.<sup>14</sup> To me, this Flow-State is one of cognizant controlled will, compartmentalized stress and discomfort, continual internal and external scrutinization and appreciation, and bliss.

Here are some practices I've found useful for maintaining a Flow-State.

- Identify a pain/stress, isolate its source, use a mental model in which I have confidence to anticipate a reality in where the pain/stress becomes maximally realized, note that it won't kill me and believe this conclusion, extinguish the stress into forgotten triviality.
- Outsource or automate as many decisions as possible:
  - \* Everything I need for a day is with reach without removing my pack. (So taking a break to fuss with my pack is blatantly needless.)
  - \* I set my watch to beep once per hour. Upon each beep, inspect how I feel, and consume a (pre-set) number of electrolyte tablets as well as at least 250 calories (if I didn't already within the hour) of appropriate nutrition.
  - \* Each crossing of water, I check if I have at least  $\frac{1}{2}$  liter. If not, I fill up my filtered flask.
  - \* Every 10 minutes, I take a sip of water. The moment I feel thirsty, I take a sip of water.
  - \* The moment I feel my eyes uncomfortable from reflected light, or my neck sunburning, or my lips getting chapped, or something bothering me on my pack, etcetera, I deal with it immediately.
  - \* When rounding a corner, or attaining a pass, I inspect and memorize the landscape ahead, making note of the upcoming route, viable trails, potential water crossings, hazards, navigation handrails, upcoming watershed boundaries, etcetera.
  - \* I follow rules I set for myself. Here are some examples:
    - no dynamic steps on snow atop boulders;
    - no dynamic steps in darkness on boulder fields;
    - abandon any sense of urgency while traveling while dark;
    - run all trail sections while light;
    - take full deep breathes, never breathe shallower/quicker than 3-step tempo;
    - commence work to extinguish a stress as soon as I notice its burden;
    - never count down: how I feel now is how I'll feel forever, but with greater challenges;
    - the moment my mood turns down, look around, find beauty, use and watch my mind;
    - when scrambling while dark and sleep-deprived, assess if I can trust my risk-assessment;
    - switch breathing tempo when switching among running, jogging, scrambling, walking, pausing;
    - sleep as soon as possible after stopping to do so.

**!!!!** Be strategic about the time of embark, where to sleep, and where to travel without the sun's light.<sup>15</sup>

**!!!!** Do it in July, not August. Obviously, the season's snowpack effects this matter a great deal: more snow would mean more and stronger fords, and more stretches across frozen water. That variable aside, longer days, and more water flow, would be

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<sup>13</sup>Certainly, there are many viable approaches to this ambition. Some of these suggestions might thusly be irrelevant for the generic SHR FKT attempter.

<sup>14</sup>My GPS track reports that I was far more efficient while in a Flow-State. It took me until the first moment of the 3<sup>rd</sup> day to sustain a prolonged Flow-State. I never sustained a Flow-State while bushwhacking.

<sup>15</sup>I have thorough and specific suggestions along these lines, which would be more efficient through communicate in real-time discussion than via this venue – contact me if you'd like to discuss this matter.

advantageous. Indeed, nighttime travel is profoundly slower than daytime travel: it's less dynamic, and route-finding is firmly less efficient. Furthermore, the increased water flow could mitigate some challenge introduced by the long South-facing high country stretches, where water can be sparse and open granite reflects the sun's light.

- !!! In constructing maps, carefully consider and record minutia (such as from which side of a drainage to initiate a climb). Consult maps in-route often. Be carefully exact about memorizing the route beforehand. I believe this is helpful for quick efficient travel, as well as for managing will.<sup>16</sup> (The one drastically wrong route I took injected irrational concern into my psyche.)
- !! Sleep amply the 10 days prior to the effort: at least 30% of each 24-hour period. Shift sleep schedule to accommodate a more natural 3am wake and 10pm bedtime.
- !! Run essentially all trail sections. I believe these sections, not nearly so much the route-finding sections, is where time can be substantively gained for relatively little physiological and emotional cost.
- ! Do it such that the final day witnesses a full moon. Exactly which period the moon offers sunless light can be important for strategizing nighttime travel. As the Southern portion of the Route is mostly on the Western side of the Sierra's crest, a waxing moon bodes well for early nighttime travel. Also, as the Northern portion of the Route is on both sides of the Sierra's crest, and it drops into lower elevation without trail, having little-to-no loss of ambient light in a 24-hour period could be advantageous for the route-finding that's involved there.
- ! In the Sierras, trails are generally so well-established that it's always a better choice to travel on a trail when one is in the vicinity than to not. Take bits of time to identify trails before striking through a seen landscape off-trail, even if the trails are merely user trails.
- ?? I'm doubtful that losing much sleep gains much speed. Indeed, travel while dark, especially off-trail, is exorbitantly slower than travel while light. Physiological, emotional, and cognitive gains from an extra hour per night of sleep are notable, especially when considering  $2\frac{\text{hours}}{\text{night}}$  versus  $3\frac{\text{hours}}{\text{night}}$  versus  $4\frac{\text{hours}}{\text{night}}$ . Consider this matter thoughtfully, primarily informed by one's experience with sleep-deprivation.

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<sup>16</sup>I didn't have time to create or memorize the SHR to my satisfaction. Should I have done so, I'm certain the nighttime off-trail sections could have been significantly quicker, and strategized around. Most notably, I could have more carefully inspected the route across the pass between Stanton Peak and Virginia Peak, and budgeted will for the prolonged route-finding of the final 25 miles. Should I have done this I believe that, with essentially no other changes to my itinerary, effort, or approach I would likely have completed the SHR in under 4 days.