

Art, Inspiration and the PCT

By **Daniel Carmin-Romack**, Communicator Designer

I wish I had a nickel for every time someone sent me a link to something on the Internet, telling me, “you’ve got to see this.” Usually it’s a questionable joke or a picture of cute animals, but every once in a while it’s something I find truly amazing. When I realize exactly what it is that I’m looking at, I get a little chill up my back. That’s how I felt when I went to the website of outdoors lover and artist **Stephen McMillan**.

Stephen was born in Berkeley, Calif., and raised in a home with a sweeping view of the San Francisco Bay, kindling his interest in landscape, one of his earliest drawing subjects. He had his first one-man show when he was 16.

Throughout his life, Stephen has been inspired and sustained by the natural world and has spent much of his time outside. Whether it’s a bike ride in the Bellingham area countryside or a weeklong backpacking trip in the high Sierra, he is renewed and invigorated by being in and moving through landscape. It is this sense of renewal that he seeks to share with others.

His connection with the PCT started during his senior year in high school when a friend suggested they “walk to L.A.” That idea morphed into a hike of the John Muir Trail in June and July of 1968. That was Stephen’s first, but far from last, PCT trek, and it changed the course of his life. Twenty years later, the same friend, **John Zalabak**, (pictured above, left. with Stephen in 1968) suggested another JMT hike. That trip is the source of many of Stephen’s PCT photos and aquatints.



Aquatint etching is a technique that produces a full tonal range and rich texture by drawing an image onto a copper plate, then burning it into the plate with acid. Ink is then added into the crevasses



and transferred to paper, re-creating the image. Of course this is a hugely simplified explanation. As an artist myself, I knew the incredible amount of work, talent and expertise that went into what I was looking at when I went to Stephen's website.

But it doesn't take a trained eye to see the beauty in what he's created. In addition to what Stephen has generously shared with us to reproduce here, you can visit his site at www.sonic.net/aquatint/

and experience it for yourself. There you can also obtain a detailed explanation of the process of creating an aquatint etching, so you too can be amazed at what you're looking at. 🐦

Editor's Note: One of Stephen's photographs of his friend John hiking is featured on the PCTA's new full-color coffee mug, available at shop.pcta.org.



