



# TWO YO-YO'S ARE BETTER THAN ONE

## An Interview with Scott Williamson

**In 2004** Scott Williamson became the first person to complete two Pacific Crest Trail (PCT) thru-hikes in succession, a feat known in the long-distance hiking world as a “yo-yo.” This 3,500-mile-accomplishment was enough to make him a PCT legend. But it wasn’t enough for Scott. In 2006, Scott put his best feet forward again and succeeded in repeating the yo-yo and breaking his own record by two weeks.

Counting each of his yo-yo’s as two thru-hikes, Scott has hiked the PCT nine times during the last 15 years – making him the most prolific PCT thru-hiker ever. With this sort of experience, we thought we would ask Scott to share his perspective on how the trail has changed in the last decade and a half, for better and for worse. And of course, like most people, we wanted to hear for ourselves exactly *why* Scott would want to yo-yo yo-yo. To learn *how* Scott has managed these epic adventures, please see the box that accompanies this article.

*Communicator:* The first question people must often ask you is “why?” And we can’t help ourselves either... Why are two yo-yo’s better than one?

**Scott:** The main reason for trying it [the yo-yo] a second time, or at least my excuse, was to break my own record in terms of the number of days it took me to do it. But the real reason was that I enjoy the PCT so much – both the trail itself and the hiking community out there every summer. It was also a personal challenge. I wanted to go back out there and do it again and prove to myself that it wasn’t just luck the first time.

Scott’s 2006 yo-yo took him approximately 191 days, 1 hour, and 20 minutes to complete. On a typical day he would hike 35 to 42 miles over the course of more than 14 hours. On these two pages we see Scott at the PCT’s southern terminus, among other scenes from his monumental journey.

*Communicator:* What is your favorite thing about the PCT yo-yo?

**Scott:** I guess it’s the challenge of making it all the way back before winter. That motivates me. It’s a race against nature. But because I’m racing nature and moving a lot faster, it’s a different type of experience than what other people are having out there. There is a bit of downside. But I really enjoy the challenge and seeing how long I can push myself. I also just love the trail itself and the people I meet while I’m on it – the thru-hikers, section-hikers, day-hikers, and trail maintainers – everybody. I meet wonderful people out there.

*Communicator:* You’ve thru-hiked the Appalachian Trail (AT), the Continental Divide Trail (CDT) and the Florida Trail, and you’ve hiked many other trails as well. But you’ve hiked the PCT nine times! What is it about the PCT that keeps you coming back?

**Scott:** One of the reasons I’m so drawn to the PCT is because out of the three North American long trails (the AT, CDT, and PCT) the PCT has the most wilderness trail tread and the most miles in roadless areas. And, the PCT has a little bit of everything that the other trails have. I just love the PCT.

*Communicator:* Would you consider yo-yo’ing one of the other long trails?

**Scott:** I’d never say never, but at this point I don’t have any interest in yo-yo’ing the AT or the CDT. Someone actually did three back-to-back AT thru-hikes in the 1980s. And while I’m not thinking about doing a CDT yo-yo, I’m sure someone will eventually.

*Communicator:* Speaking of other yo-yo’ers, do know of anyone else who’s poised to do a PCT yo-yo?

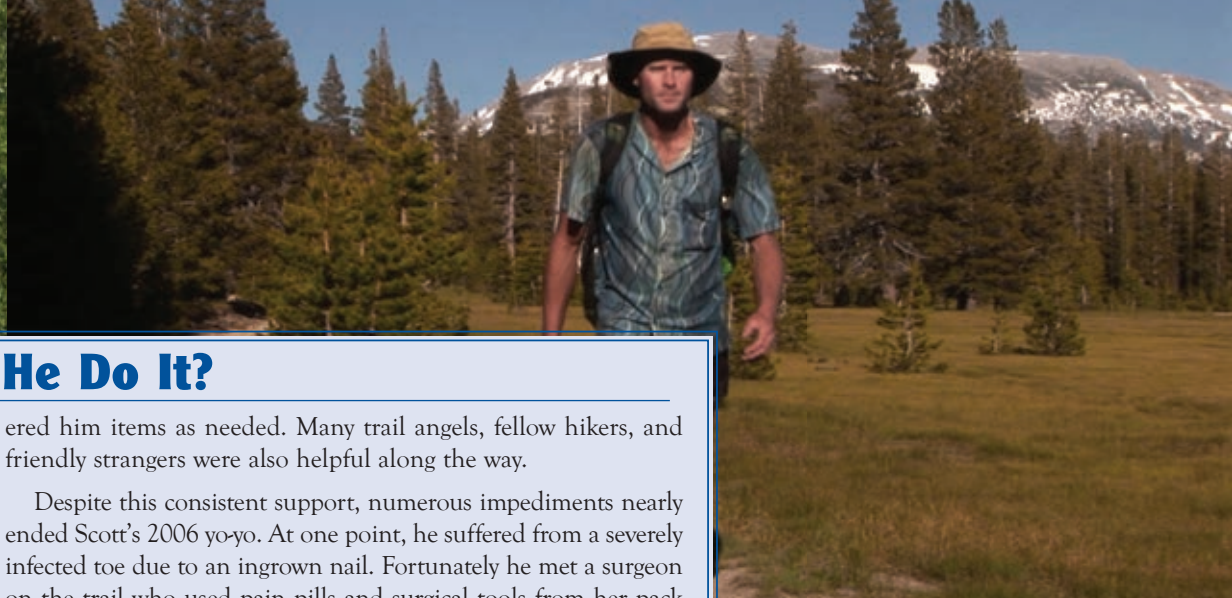
**Scott:** I haven’t heard of anyone planning a 2007 attempt. But there are certainly people out there who could do it. My record will be a pretty easy one to beat. It’s only a matter of time before people discover the secret of the PCT yo-yo: it means you get to spend more time on the trail!

*Communicator:* So, what’s next?

**Scott:** Well, I’m getting married in June. It will hopefully be a laid-back camp-out wedding and then Michelle, my fiancée, and I will attempt a southbound PCT thru-hike as our honeymoon. This will be her first long-distance hike and I’m really excited to be a part of that and to introduce her to it. People may not believe this, but I know how to take my time and enjoy a hike if I want to.

Then there’s this other idea I had to do a winter PCT thru-hike and ski trip. But I have no concrete plans. It’s just an idea that I’m





## How Does He Do It?

Approximately ten million steps, 3,500 miles, 191 days, 26 predetermined resupply stops, a second PCT yo-yo, and one 34-year-old PCT legend – **Scott Williamson**.

A single thru-hike of the PCT can take up to six months. But Scott Williamson, during his second PCT yo-yo (which is defined as two thru-hikes completed in succession) left the Mexican border and the southern terminus of the PCT on May 22, 2006, and reached the Canadian border in just under three months on August 18th. There, he stopped for a one-hour lunch before turning around and heading back to where he started. He reached the southern end of the PCT again on November 28, 2006, marking his ninth successful PCT thru-hike.

During this yo-yo, Scott's ULA pack (without food or water) weighed about eight pounds, including a one-pound video camera he carried for **Shaun Carrigan**, who will use the footage for the next installment of his *Tell It on the Mountain* PCT documentary. Scott didn't carry a stove, but instead ate a mostly organic diet of protein shakes, dried fruit, crackers, and refried beans. He augmented this diet by foraging for fresh food as he hiked, morsels like miner's lettuce, wild onions and berries. His typical dinner consisted of dehydrated refried beans mixed with water, crumbled organic corn chips, and olive oil. To keep up his energy, he ate two to three pounds of food each day, and "pigged out" during town stops on junk food and at salad bars. While Scott hiked alone, his father, **Dave Williamson**, and fiancée, **Michelle Turley**, served as a support team and mailed and deliv-

ered him items as needed. Many trail angels, fellow hikers, and friendly strangers were also helpful along the way.

Despite this consistent support, numerous impediments nearly ended Scott's 2006 yo-yo. At one point, he suffered from a severely infected toe due to an ingrown nail. Fortunately he met a surgeon on the trail who used pain pills and surgical tools from her pack to perform a minor operation to remove the toenail and keep him hiking. Swollen streams and creeks in northern Yosemite National Park filled with runoff from record snowfall nearly stopped him as well. Bear Creek turned out to be a real bear – requiring three hours to successfully cross. Four different forest fires burned near the trail during Scott's hike. At times they were so close that Scott hiked through their intense heat. And at one point Scott became severely ill for five days and lost 25 pounds, presumably from an intestinal infection such as giardia. Overcoming these hurdles required unique mental and physical stamina.

Over the years, Scott has developed skills and insights to cope with just about anything the PCT can throw his way and not surprisingly he's often asked to share these skills and insights with others through talks and slideshows. If you'd like to learn from Scott's experiences, you can attend one of his upcoming workshops in Truckee, California (visit [www.pctthruhiker.com](http://www.pctthruhiker.com) for a schedule), or plan to attend PCTA's Trail Fest in Seattle where Scott will be giving a presentation. You can also find Scott's gear list, hiking history, and interesting statistics at [www.pctthruhiker.com](http://www.pctthruhiker.com).

kicking around. I believe that in the next five years someone will do a winter thru-hike.

*Communicator:* Because you've thru-hiked the PCT nine times in the last 15 years, you have a unique perspective on the trail and its status. Are there things you've seen out there that concern you in terms of the future of the PCT?

**Scott:** I've seen both positive and negative changes on the PCT since I first hiked it in 1992. The biggest positive change is that there's a much more cohesive community having to do with the trail. There are more hikers, more trail angels, more trail maintainers. And there's just a lot more information available and better communication of information regarding the trail. The information that is out there for people before they start out on their hikes is 100 times better than it used to be.

Trail maintenance is also greatly improved. When I first hiked the PCT, there were areas in Southern California that were nearly impassable. There are still some sections that need work but it's so much better than it used to be. I credit **Pete Fish** [recently retired PCTA Southern California Regional Coordinator] and his trail crews with that.

The biggest negative that I've seen is related to the larger numbers of people using the trail in the spring in Southern California. This year, there was definitely a trash, toilet paper, and human waste problem, especially around water sources and water caches. I'm not saying that we have a wild or inconsiderate group out there,

most people know and practice low-impact techniques; it's just a factor of numbers. Of course, I know that I'm out there too and I'm having an impact as well.

The tradeoff is that higher numbers of trail users, in the long run, can also help to protect the trail because it means that more people know about it and care about it. More people using the trail means the trail will get more attention and more money. If the numbers and funding aren't there, then the good fights that need to be staged for the trail's protection can't be staged.

In terms of development threatening the trail, in recent years certain sections of Southern California have residential housing popping up all over the place. At this point it's not bad, but in some areas, like south of Cajon Pass and just north of Agua Dulce, I think the trail is threatened by major housing development. In the Pacific Northwest, I've seen a real slowdown in the rate of clear-cut logging, which is good news.

I'd say that, overall, I've seen more positive changes than negative ones.

*Communicator:* Any parting words for our readers?

**Scott:** In many ways, I've sacrificed a lot of areas of my life to be on the trail so much. I don't have a home. I drive derelict cars. Financially, I'm on the poor side. But I feel like I'm a rich man because the PCT has had a lot of wealth to offer me. The PCT has a lot to offer all of us. □

In addition to the beautiful scenery depicted on these pages, Scott encountered a lot of wildlife during his yo-yo. He was fortunate to see 42 bears, 13 coyotes, 4 scorpions, and 1 mountain lion. The highest temperature he experienced was 117 degrees Fahrenheit, the lowest was 5 degrees Fahrenheit.

All of the photographs illustrating this article have been provided courtesy of **Shaun Carrigan** and [www.TellitontheMountain.com](http://www.TellitontheMountain.com).

