

The Making of the First Pacific Crest Trail Guidebook

Five 'trail scouts' launched the title that brought so many to the PCT

By Barney "Scout" Mann

"Honoring the Best in Outdoor Writing and Publishing." In 2008, the *Pacific Crest Trail Guides* won a National Outdoor Book Award. The three volumes in the series earned front-cover medallions, and just like a medal for valor, there was a citation: *The Pacific Crest Trail Guides* have been and remain the best of the best."

The *Pacific Crest Trail Guides* have sold more than 100,000 copies, putting them in bestseller territory. So they were inevitable, right? Just like penicillin.

But actually, penicillin was not inevitable. Discovered in 1896, it was then forgotten. Even when Alexander Fleming chanced upon it 30 years later, it was just contaminant in his Petri dish. It killed the bacteria he was growing. Throw it out? Fleming published a paper instead.

In 1972, **Thomas Winnett**, founder of Wilderness Press, had a germ of an idea, a guidebook for the new PCT in California. But only a handful had hiked the PCT. Where was the market?

A Wharton business professor would have taken a red pen and whacked away, feeling as righteous as a trail-brush cutter set loose in Section "O."

"A PCT Guidebook? Crazy. Run – don't walk – away." But Winnett did as Fleming had done. He published.

The *PCT Guides*...This is their story.

Fybate Notes.

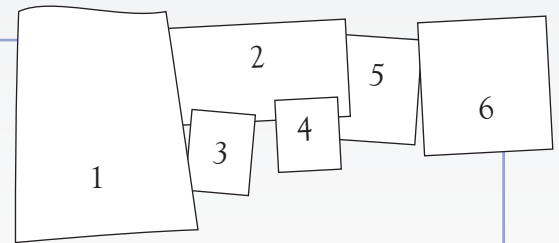
In the 1940s, students at University of California, Berkeley, bought Fybate Notes to cram for exams. A surviving, coffee-stained Fybate folio of the era features a steel-eyed owl on the cover. A claw clutches a quill pen perched over the slogan "Words for the Wise."

In 1947, one of the Berkeley Fybate Notes crowd was Thomas Winnett, a lean, brash, body-surfing World War II vet. Tom was finishing the backside of a war-interrupted college career and was looking for part-time work. He answered an ad: "Note Takers Wanted."



Captions:

1. Cover of well-used original guidebook.
2. Photo of Tom Winnett and Ken Fawcett together from the 1976 catalogue.
3. Andrew Husari photo on page 6 of the 1976 Wilderness Press Catalogue.
4. Photo of John Robinson in 1955 on top of Sawtooth Peak in the Sierra Nevada, courtesy John Robinson.
5. Photo of Jim Jenkins courtesy Roslyn Bullas.
6. Photo of Tom Winnett courtesy Roslyn Bullas.



All photos this article by **Barney Mann** (unless otherwise stated).

Winnett's first Fybate assignment was Geology I. It turned into the first of

many. Upon his graduation, Fybate's owner, **Laurabelle Burckhardt**, offered Winnett the editor's job. Five years later, when Burckhardt retired, Winnett bought her out. Tom Winnett had a printing press.

A 1966 Lunch

A dozen years later, Winnett and an old friend, **Karl Schwenke**, met at a popular street-side haunt three blocks south of the Berkeley campus, at Telegraph and Haste. Though it was a pivotal lunch, in our October 2009 interview Winnett couldn't recall the restaurant's name.

Sadly, that's often as not the norm for him today. Tom Winnett is now 88, gaunt and in the grip of late-stage Parkinson's disease. This interview may be his last. Indeed, it was set twice. The first time, I waited for over an hour at his Berkeley Hills doorstep before learning that Winnett had been rushed to the hospital. Thankfully, it was a false alarm. So this restaurant's name and many of Winnett's stories are lost. But just this once, in gapped phrases, like a torn guidebook with missing pages, he gave enough clues to pick out the way.

"It was ... on ... the northwest corner." He was right. Though the restaurant has since moved, there was only one long-standing restaurant at that corner, La Fiesta. A booth in La Fiesta should have had a brass plaque: "Here Began Wilderness Press." Tom recounted: "We got to talking about the Sierra Nevada one day over lunch. We decided that there was probably a market for trail guides, so we decided to make one."

With a gestation period and birth weight remarkably close to that of a Sierra black bear, *Sierra North, 100 Back-Country Trips*, was published in May 1967. Pass the cigars. 8.2 ounces. The first Wilderness Press title.

Sold out. Sweet words. In two months there was a second printing, and in July 1969, a third.

Trails of the Angeles, Sierra North, and other titles followed. Wilderness Press birthed pocket-sized *High Sierra Hiking Guides*, seemingly in triplets each year. The popular 96-page guides each covered one 15-minute quadrangle map and made a snug bulge in many a trail jeans' pocket.

Winnett recalls, "I have always been credited with the basic role of being publisher, but Karl did a lot of the work on the first eight or 10 books." In 1970, Karl Schwenke moved on, leaving for a small Vermont farm.

But as Schwenke left, in the early 1970's, Winnett's business faced a storm. A Category 5 hurricane had come ashore aimed straight for Fybate Notes. Like a hurricane, it had a single name: Xerox.

A student would buy one Fybate folio and then "Xerox" a dozen cheap ones for friends. Business cratered. Winnett countered with sandbags, raising the dikes by printing Fybate Notes in blue. Blue print was hard to copy, but not hard enough. Winnett's final gasp was to print Fybate Notes in a pink and yellow checkerboard.

Xerox was thwarted, but the notes were illegible. Xerox swept the ground clean like a 100-year storm. For Winnett, it was guidebooks or nothing.

Two Final Links: LBJ and a Bestseller

In 1968, Congress passed the National Trails Systems Act. With a flourishing swipe of Lyndon Johnson's pen, the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail became real. A scant three years later, in 1971, a PCT bestseller swept America - *The High Adventures of Eric Ryback*.

Today, **Jeff Schaffer**, a co-author of the first PCT guidebook, recalls, "Eric Ryback really was very important getting things started.... All of a sudden there's the Trail, you know it's nationwide... an awful lot of publicity. Tom seizes on it and says 'well hey ... I got a guide to the John Muir Trail. I got one to the Yosemite Trail, might as well have one to the Pacific Crest Trail.'" Might as well, indeed.

The "Trail Scouting" Summer of 1972

The opening words for *The Pacific Crest Trail, Vol. I: California*: "To put out a guide for 1650 miles of trail required a lot."

For one, it required authors. There were five: **John Robinson** and Winnett, both already-proven Wilderness Press veterans; and newcomers Schaffer, **Andrew Husari** and **Jim Jenkins**.

Winnett called their job "trail scouting." All summer, in a series of mostly day hikes, the five scratched away on maps and filled pocket notepads. Each had his own style. Winnett hauled a reel-to-reel tape-recorder, a cord stretching from his pack to a front-pocket microphone. Flicking a switch, he'd take oral notes on the trail.

Jim Jenkins, the youngest at 19, used a surveyor's wheel. The others counted paces or relied on the **U. S. Forest Service** data.

Schaffer used only the sharpest of mechanical pencils, and held forth that his pacing "was as accurate as a machine." He got his chance to prove it one day, squaring-off, John Henry-like, against a surveyor's wheel on a 10-mile course in Yosemite. The result is still recorded in Schaffer's smile.

Urgency was in the air. Finishing the work that summer was a close thing. Close enough that the *Guide's* acknowledgements said, "Ken Ng's shuttle taxi helped us beat the winter snow."

The southernmost section, Campo to Tehachapi, belonged to Robinson, a middle-school teacher on the downhill side of a 33-year career. His author's pen had two notches already: *Trails of the Angeles* and *San Bernardino Mountain Trails*. Today, at 80, he remains an author on both titles. Interviewed recently, Robinson offered this: "You write a novel and you're through. You write a guidebook and you're never through."

The northernmost section, Castle Crags to Ashland, was Husari's. He too, was a public-school teacher. He also was an active **Sierra Club** leader. In 2003 he passed on, leaving *PCT Vol. I* his first and only guidebook credit.

Jenkins claimed the Southern Sierra, Tehachapi to Crabtree Meadow. He was the youngest pup by a decade. Jenkins authored other Wilderness Press titles, *Exploring the Southern Sierra* and *Self-Propelled in the Southern Sierra*. But he was unavailable to interview for this story.

The frontispiece of his 1979 *Self-Propelled* guide reads, "In Memorium... As this book was being printed, the author was struck dead by a car."

In 1984, culminating an effort spearheaded by Winnett, a south Sierra peak was named Mount Jenkins.

And then there are the final two, Schaffer and Winnett. Schaffer had the longest stretch, Interstate 80 to Castle Crags, leaving Winnett the section of trail from Crabtree Meadow to Interstate 80. In 1972, the two in years were a father's and son's distance apart, Schaffer 29 and Winnett 52. Schaffer had lost his own dad just two years earlier.

Schaffer says today, "When my father died, we were all failures." With Winnett, Schaffer was an immediate success, soon hired full time – and soon the assistant publisher. Schaffer basked in Winnett's evident pride. The 1976 Wilderness Press Catalogue carried a full paragraph lauding Schaffer's accuracy. A photo showed a long-side-burned Schaffer looking closely over Winnett's shoulder.

But like a father and son, the two had their moments. There was the time Schaffer was set to run a photo of himself, featuring his own naked backside. "Draw in a swimsuit," Winnett said. "I took a pen and drew on a Speedo, but it looked so obviously drawn that I smudged it to make it look more realistic," Schaffer recalls. Pen in hand, he went to work on one other feature. "I had a very conspicuous bald spot...That, I covered up."

May 10, 1973

On that day *The Pacific Crest Trail, Volume I: California* was released.

est Trail nia

this is my first guidebook.
I remain proud of my effort
to this day.
Jeffrey P. Schaffer
29 August 2008



Later, the California guide was split in two. Both volumes are now in their sixth edition. The Oregon and Washington guide, which soon followed, was published in 1974 and is now in its seventh edition.

What's the future for the guidebooks? I reached **Roslyn Bullas**, who sits today at the helm of a Wilderness Press recently acquired by Keen Communications. When I posed that question, her response was silence and a long sigh.

Finally, she offered, "We're running a non-profit project in a for-profit business."

If it's a comfort, Schaffer reports that it's been the same way from the start. The guidebooks are expensive to produce. Somehow they manage to survive.

"Tom, did you have a guiding philosophy?"

"People in general are not going to do anything to protect the wilderness unless they have been there personally and enjoyed it."

"So you wanted people to get out there?"

"Yes."

Guidebooks engender strong feelings, and the three PCT volumes are no exception. In 1976, **Teddi Boston**, the first PCT solo woman thru-hiker, ran into Winnett out on the trail. "Are you carrying a guidebook?" he asked.

"You bet," Boston replied, pulling out Winnett's book. "It's my bible."

Winnett's reported reply was, "I'm in love."

Then there's the word "romp." A digital search of all three volumes shows that it appears once. The book says you'll "romp" along the trail just north of southern California's Lake Morena. Many

hikers read the word in 90-degree heat, nursing new blisters. Perhaps they substitute the word "rant" instead.

Finally, though its origin is unknown, many long-distance PCT hikers have a beloved nickname for their guidebook bible. For its minor indiscretions, they call it "The Book of Lies."

But what remains is one thing on which all agree: from the beginning to today, the Wilderness Press *Pacific Crest Trail Guides* played a critical role in promoting the PCT. 🐾

Acknowledgments:

To Tom Winnett and Jeff Schaffer for opening their homes and patiently indulging long interviews, and to John Robinson, and to Roslyn Bullas and her Wilderness Press staff who were gracious with their assistance and time.



Captions: Page 24: Copy of Jeff Schaffer's signed page of guidebook. Page 24, left inset: Original 1972 hand-cut map overlay. Page 24, right inset: Copy of actual Map 94, which the hand-cut overlay was used to create. Above: Roslyn Bullas with Wilderness Press sign from the 1970's.

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