ribbon of tawny trail peeks between ivory snow banks, like a caramel swirl topping a sundae. The photo is innocuous. The story is not.

Who was the Pacific Crest Trail’s Charles Lindberg? Many can answer, “Eric Ryback.” Who was the PCT’s Amelia Earhart? That's a $1,000 Jeopardy question. Not many will come up with the name Teddi Boston.

It was 1976 and Boston was the first woman to solo thru-hike the Pacific Crest Trail.
“It rained like crazy,” she said. “Oh god, I fell in love with it.”

She started her thru-hike on May 1, 1976. Nothing unusual about that. But she was 49, a mother of four and she didn’t start from Campo. She started May 1 from Manning Park, Canada. Hanging on her pack was a red-striped lace, white ash snowshoes and a thick-shafted ice axe. They weren’t for show.

Snow was Boston’s milieu. At the height of a 1927 northern Maine winter, Teddi, actually Theo Ward, arrived in the world, number five of eight Ward kids on a 500-acre potato farm in Aroostook County.

“When I was ten, my dad said, ‘climb up on this tractor and see that field.’” Soon ten-year-old Boston was harrowing. “And eventually you got promoted to plow the field.”

“I grew up with snow.” For the ebullient Boston — her hands punctuated her speech — that’s a rare understatement. Boston’s rural school system had a 12-student high school and a single, overtaxed bus. From ninth grade on, you were on your own. For four Maine winters, Boston snowshoed or cross-country skied the three miles to school.

Boston’s first crush wasn’t a boy, it was the outdoors. The culmination of eight Ward kids on a 50-acre potato farm in Aroostook County practically had to sprint for shelter as he was pelted by a Sierra thundershower of newsprint and magazine stories. The first feature article in Backpacker’s first issue covered Ryback. Boston’s hike got her fired.

For a 1950’s and 60’s housewife, any indication of outdoor adventure should have ended there.

But in the 1960’s, with two daughters in Girl Scouts, Boston ven- tered her first backpack into California’s San Bernardino Mountains. The second, The Mainliner, was United Airlines’ inflight throw-away. Both magazines misspelled her name. The Mainliner gave Boston 60 words. For a 2,604-mile trek, that’s 44.5 miles per word.

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“The second-most memorable photo of the trek is one Boston didn’t take. Just south of the California border at Lower Devil’s Lookout, she met Deems Burton. Very few issues of the PCT Communicator pass without a photo by Deems Burton, today a U.S. Forest Service veteran. But on that day, Deems was 21, out on his first day on the PCT. His photo shows Boston’s wide grin under a Raggedy Ann mop of burnt-orange hair. She holds her ice axe at parade rest.

In early July, Boston got a brief splash of newsprint in her hometown paper. “Anaheim Mother Tackles 2600 Mile Trek Alone.” Her boss read the paper. Sick Leave? He brought her up on “charges” before the school board. While she was somewhere just north of the Sierra, the superintendent sent her a dismissal notice, certified mail.

At Silver Pass in the Sierra, Boston ran into a hiker who was hitting into Bend, Ore., the doctor told her she needed to stay off the trail. Fat chance. A couple camping at Ollid Lake took her in for a week. When she hiked off, they begged her to stay.

When she got lost — after that she started carrying four different maps — and she badly scratched her cornea, she said, “I’ve never known such pain.”

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In the Mojave Desert, practically the home stretch, Boston worried about the lack of water. What she got was Hurricane Kathleen, still listed as California’s worst tropical storm. It rained more than 10 inches over 17 hours.

On day 169, Boston reached the Mexican border. She had lost thirty pounds, weighing in at 114 pounds at the end of her hike. Her children and 20 of their friends greeted her there with 16 bottles of pink champagne. They hoisted her on their shoulders. The local paper said she was wearing a 2,614-mile grin and a “Mexico or Bust” T-shirt. “I want to do it again,” she proclaimed.

Two years ago, Boston left her longtime Anaheim home. This summer, like many 84 year olds, she wakes each day in a claustrophobic room that passes for home. She knows the tiny room’s dimensions – 78 by 78 inches, not much larger than the footprint of her PCT thru-hike tent, an A-frame, Eddie Bauer. There’s no photo of Howard on the walls. Though undaunted by the PCT, Boston was badly shaken when her husband died of prostate cancer in 1987.

There is one photo of two great-grandkids. Sleep comes hard these days. “I really do try to stay in bed until four.” Rising early Teddi puts on the same clothes she does most every morning. Drab green. It’s her Forest Service uniform.

That little room is a small cabin in Camp Tulakes, 6,000 feet high in the San Bernardino National Forest. Boston is an 18-year veteran volunteer with the San Gorgonio Wilderness Association, and is the group’s lead volunteer coordinator. Last year she supervised 120 trail volunteers, all the while chalking up 1,154 volunteer hours herself. Her “boss,” Valerie Silva, SGWA executive director, calls her a human dynamo. “What I like most about her is how she gets along with everybody.”

She can still set a trail pace to blister your feet.

In 1976, Backpacker magazine ignored Teddi’s hike, but in November 2010, it published a short article to set matters right. The magazine included a belated apology for waiting 35 years to recognize her feat.

Boston recently was asked: What would it mean to you today to see what you wrote in the trail register in Campo? “Oh, that should be a charmer,” she said. “After all these years I would love to see my comments.”

Wish granted. Here’s Boston’s 1976 entry in the Campo trail register, part of the PCTA archives:

A truly fascinating experience. I must admit the San Bernardino N.F. is the worst marked forest in the whole trail system – needless. They have the signs stored in a shed. I met nothing but fantastic people the full length of the trail. And if I, a woman alone can do the trail then anyone can do it. Prepare properly, have the right equipment and the right attitude and everything will work out well. A fantastic trip through a fantastic trail. I’m glad I’m me and where I want to be! - Teddi