

# *On the Trail* with pioneer thru-hiker Teddi Boston

By Barney "Scout" Mann

**A 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.**





In 1970, Ryback returned to a book deal, a run-away bestseller. He practically had to sprint for shelter as he was pelted by a Sierra thunderstorm of newsprint and magazine stories. The first feature article in *Backpacker's* first issue covered Ryback. Boston's hike got her fired. And as for press coverage, there was no thunder, no lightning. Two magazines wrote about her. The first, the long-defunct *Backpacking Journal*, shoe-horned Boston into a story about four other women. The second, *The Mainliner*, was United Airlines' in-flight throw-away. Both magazines misspelled her name. *The Mainliner* gave Boston 60 words. For a 2,614-mile trek, that's 44.5 miles per word.

Boston 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 were rawhide-laced, 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 if your feet touch the pedals.'" They did. "He said, 'Take it over to 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 punctuate her speech - that's a rare understatement. Boston's rural school system had a 110-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 culprits were her parents, **Emory** and **Muriel Ward**. "My dad would take me hunting, which meant 'Here, carry these two rifles.' I remember my mom on a hot day would say, 'Let's go to the woods.' And we did. Often."

College pried her loose from Maine. She graduated in 1949 from Clark University in Worcester, Mass. Today, she acts as if it were the most natural thing that a 1940's potato-farm girl went to college. But one thing she'll admit wasn't the norm: when she married **Howard Boston** in 1947, she didn't leave college to become the good wife.

In the 1950's, the Bostons moved west to Anaheim, Calif. Teddi Boston settled into a school district job as purchasing coordinator. She had four children: **Doreen**, **Craig**, **Denise** and **Howard**. According to the gospel of *Leave it to Beaver*, for a 1950's and 60's housewife, any tales of outdoor adventure should have ended there.

But in the 1960's, with two daughters in **Girl Scouts**, Boston ventured on her first backpack into California's San Bernardino Mountains. "It rained like crazy," she said. "Oh god, I fell in love with it."

Soon she was taking eight girls on a full John Muir Trail hike. And it was there, in 1972, that Boston met her first PCT thru-hiker. That's all it took. She came home, bought Ryback's PCT book and started to plan her own thru-hike.

She made a detailed, day-by-day 11-page itinerary with 16 mail drops. She took a built-up load of sick leave and requested six months off. On May Day 1976, toting a 65-pound pack, Boston couldn't have been further removed from twirling ribbons around a sunny May Pole. A blizzard in Washington drove her into her tent for two days.

Her local paper, *The Register*, recorded her routine for the early weeks: "Up at 3:30 a.m. daily, she walked on the frozen crust until about 10 a.m., when the sun, melting the snow, forced her to don her snowshoes. Since all trail markers were buried by the snow, she did the first month by compass and map. When she got far enough south to find her first trail marker she was fewer than 10 feet off the trail."

That was the ribbon of caramel in the photo. Almost four weeks into her hike and Boston saw the PCT tread for the first time.

Crossing the Columbia River into Oregon, she remembers: "I had to pay 50 cents. I understand today they don't charge you to cross the Bridge of the Gods." Northern Oregon brought two setbacks. She got lost - after that she started carrying four different maps - and she badly scratched her cornea. "I've never known such pain," she said. Hitching into Bend, Ore., the doctor told her she needed to stay off the trail. Fat chance. A couple camping at Odell Lake took her in for a week. When she hiked off, they begged her to stay.

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 30-year **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 popping off questions before offering his name. It was **Thomas Winnett**, the PCT guidebook author and Wilderness Press founder. "When he learned I was thru-hiking he asked what I was carrying to guide me," she recalled. "I said, 'The Bible. Everyone carries the Bible.' I pulled out my PCT California guidebook. The book he'd written. He puffed up like a puffer fish and said, 'I'm in love.'"



“What I like most about her is how she gets along with everybody.”

- Valerie Silva, SGWA executive director

Previous pages: Teddi Boston on Lower Devils Peak above Seiad Valley, June 22, 1976, during her 1976 thru-hike. Photo by Deems C. Burton.  
Left: Teddi Boston today in her Forest Service uniform, above Barton Flats in the San Bernardino National Forest. Photo by Barney Mann.



## Fans, Family Hug Anaheim Mom At End Of Canada-Mexico Trek

By LINDA GRANELL  
Register Staff Writer

CAMPO, Calif. — Wearing a 2,614-mile grin and a "Mexico or Bust" T-shirt, Teddie Boston strode to the Mexican border Saturday and proclaimed, "I want to do it again."

She was then engulfed by about 25 hugging, crying, champagne-carrying fans here to congratulate the 48-year-old Anaheim mother as she ended her five-month trek down the Pacific Crest Trail from Canada to Mexico.

"It's so hard to believe it's over," she said with a sad smile. "It's hard to believe I've spent my last night, heard my last wind in the pines, howl of coyotes, hoot of the owl."

Since May 1, Teddie has been caught in snowstorms, Northern California droughts and fires and Tropical Storm Kathleen in the Mojave Desert. She's been cut, stung and sprained. But, she says, she's never been tired.

"Every time I'd come into a town and get cleaned up, it would feel like a new trip," she said.

And, although she's been alone most of the time, she's never been lonely. "One young man who didn't finish said he didn't realize how lonely lonely really is. To make a trip like this, you have to be able to live with yourself, accept yourself, as you really are. I'm happy with myself, happier than I was five months ago," she said.

As she talked, Teddie said the trip highlights were ever-changing — the scenery, the people, her daughters joining her for the last 100 miles.

"I kept up on the downhills, but she cremated us on the uphill," said daughter Den-



**TEDDIE BOSTON, 60-POUND PACK RIDE IN TRIUMPH**  
Champagne Seltie Extra Weight For Bill McKee, Anaheim

ise, 21. Doreen, 22, said she was proud she could finish just the last leg with her mother.

Then Teddie looked at the young people surrounding her—neighbors from Anaheim, hikers she met en route and some Craig, 19, and Howard, 17, and said, "To me this has been the most over-

whelming part of the trip, to have all these kids accept me."  
Teddie will return to Anaheim about \$3,000 poorer (the cost of equipment and expenses), three dress sizes smaller, and jobless. She was fired from the Anaheim Union High School District job she held

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Left: The October 17, 1976, article in The Register, the Orange County, Calif., daily, reporting the completion of Boston's hike. Above: Boston takes a break during her hike. Photos from the collection of Teddi Boston.

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 long-time 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 Teddie 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!* 🐦