

Hiker close to setting record for PCT

By Geoff Baker, Seattle Times

MCKENZIE PASS, Ore. – Seattle native Joe McConaughy smiles as he bounds into a wooded clearing and spots the familiar green truck.

When you've speed-hiked 55 miles per day for six weeks over mountains, boulders and creeks, dodging the odd bear and rattlesnake, that dirt-covered Honda Pilot had better be there before the sun sets. On this late afternoon, already 38 miles into his daily effort, the SUV's presence means McConaughy is guaranteed a 20-minute respite for his battered feet and a coveted peanut butter and jelly sandwich.

The vehicle, dubbed "carne asada," contains his support crew of three close friends shadowing his attempt to cover the 2,663-mile Pacific Crest Trail in a record-setting 59 days or fewer.

"I need my PB and J right now or I might pass out," McConaughy, 23, said with a grin as he collapsed into a folding chair set up for him in the grass alongside this part of the trail, about 20 miles from Sisters, Ore.

Missing such crucial checkpoints has posed the biggest threat to McConaughy's record quest, which began June 18 in Campo, about 15 feet from the Mexican border. Now, some 2,155 miles later, he crossed the Columbia River into Washington at 2:30pm last Friday at least 15 pounds lighter, somewhat beaten up, but with the finish line in sight. Earlier in the week, while still in Oregon, he was optimistic about breaking the record.

"You never want to say the worst is over with because you never know what can happen at any given moment," McConaughy

said as he removed his shoes and socks to pick at his dirt-blackened, callused toes. "But I'm hoping that whatever happens from here on, it's something I can manage."

McConaughy expects to reach the trail's end at the Canadian border near Manning Park, B.C., by Aug. 9 or 10, with a record-smashing completion time of 53 or 54 days. Records are unofficial and reported by those who hike this storied trail on somewhat of an honor system, though McConaughy is carrying a satellite phone that tracks time and progress.

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