

# Fires create gaps in Pacific Crest Trail

By Associated Press

Vast wildfires have created lengthy gaps in Southern California sections of the famed Pacific Crest Trail, which hikers must bypass via shuttles or alternate routes to avoid dangerous conditions like unstable trees and loose rocks.

Long-distance backpackers must be shuttled by van around the closures or risk incurring \$2,500 fines, the *Riverside Press-Enterprise* reported this week.

To get around a 15.5-mile gap caused by a wildfire last year in the San Bernardino National Forest, hikers are driven from the Whitewater Trail House in Cabazon to Onyx Summit on State Route 38, where the trail reopens.

About 14 miles of the trail approaching the mountain town of Idyllwild are closed three years after a blaze scorched more than 27,000 acres.

Each year, thousands trek sections of the 2,650-mile Pacific Crest Trail, which runs from Mexico to Canada.

Some of the adventurers – who often take on nicknames for their journeys – aren't thrilled with the idea of getting into a van after retreating into the wilderness. Last week in Idyllwild, Bruce "Man in Black" Cornish of San Diego planned to research an alternate hiking route to bypass the closed section while waiting for friends.

At 59, he retired early from a job as an eighth-grade science teacher to hike the entire route after dreaming about the trip for 20 years.

"The philosophy of this trail is, 'Hike your own hike'," he

told the newspaper. "If people want to hitch ahead, that's cool. It's just not for me."

Danger in the unstable areas can come from falling branches dubbed "widow-makers," dead giant trees with weak roots that can fall and crush hikers, the U.S. Forest Service said. Loose rocks, debris including rolling logs, flash floods, trailside stump holes and slippery ash can also pose a danger.

Crews are working to remove charred trees and fill in holes to make the trails passable again. While some hikers are impatient for the work to finish, others don't mind catching an occasional ride.

"I know some other people who are what we call 'purists' – want to hike every inch of the trail," said Robert "Bobcat" Donnellan, 38, of Asheville, N.C., sitting at a picnic table outside the Whitewater home where he was staying April 13. "I personally don't care."