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INVESTIGATING THE THRU-HIKING EXPERIENCE: A STUDY ON THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST NATIONAL SCENIC TRAIL

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Abstract

The phenomena of thru-hiking has been on a dramatic rise, spurring hikers to venture onto increasingly remote and challenging trails over extended periods of time. Despite the recent popularity of thru-hiking, the field remains relatively unstudied. In recreation, the expectations held beforehand have been linked to perceptions after an activity, but this has not been explored in thru-hiking. For example, there is little known on the challenges associated with thru-hiking and how these challenges are navigated. Additionally, the social experience associated with thru-hiking on and off the trail has not been studied. Further, research is lacking on immersive experiences such as thru-hiking and hikers' transition back to 'regular' life. Through exploration of these areas, there will be an increased understanding of the thru-hikers and their actions, a field that is growing greatly in popularity and yet little research has been conducted. With a better understanding of thru-hikers, managers will be able to better adopt their plans and strategies to incorporate the unique characteristics of this user group. Without an increased understanding of thru-hiker attitudes and behaviors, managers will lack the necessary knowledge to effectively manage long distance hiking trails, which could negatively impact the natural resources of the trail and the hiker experience.

This study addresses these gaps by investigating the thru-hiker experience of the Pacific Northwest National Scenic Trail (PNNST), a trail best known for its remoteness and rugged features. The study also examines what thru-hikers believe should be maintained or reconsidered in the face of the impending management plan. Multi-phase semi-structured interviews were conducted with 42 of the 2017 PNNST thru-hikers before their hike, directly after completion, and two months after completion. The research focused on how pre-hike expectations and previous experiences affect the experience of the thru-hiker, how thru-hikers navigate adverse circumstances, how the social aspect impacts the thru-hiker experience, and how completion of a thru-hike affects the transition back to everyday life. The findings suggest that previous experience and expectations for the trail have an impact on how thru-hikers interpret their experience, with many describing how the PNNST met or did not meet their expectations going into the trail. Thru-hikers dealt with challenges utilizing both mental and physical strategies, which were unique depending upon their previous levels of experience. Additionally, the research suggests

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that the thru-hiking experience will have an impact on the lives of the majority of thru-hikers going forward. This study's findings contribute to the theoretical understanding of thru-hiking and is useful to land managers, recreational planners, and community planners for extended trails and trail towns.

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This trail is part of the Pacific Northwest National Scenic Trail. The whole trail is absolutely gorgeous, but this part is particularly stunning. This part of the trail will take you from the Foot of Blanchard Mountain, across tidelands, over an old rail road bridge, through the heart of Fidalgo Island, and finally to Deception Pass Bridge. Need to Know. Follow SR 20 west (right). Just hike on the shoulder as best as possible. There is a sidewalk on the bridge. Once you are over the bridge and past the casino, take a right on Casino Drive, then a left on S March Point Rd. For instructions to continue onto Keystone follow the Pacific Northwest National Scenic Trail: Deception Pass-Keystone. Happy Trails! Flora & Fauna. Pacific Northwest National Scenic Trail (PNNST) – This is the congressional name for the trail, awarded in 2009 when the trail was designated as a National Scenic Trail. Pacific North West Trail (PNWT) – Many older documents, signs and reference materials refer to the trail using this name. We encourage you to use Pacific Northwest Trail, or PNT for short. How many people hike the Pacific Northwest Trail? Which activities are allowed on the trail? Is the Pacific Northwest Trail open to horses and stock? Are dogs allowed on the Pacific Northwest Trail? The experience of the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail shows us that this process may take decades to accomplish. Is the Pacific Northwest Trail open to horses and stock? Horses can use much of the trail. Pacific Ocean Pacific Northwest Continental Divide Day Hike North West Wilderness Trail Washington Hiking. The PNT follows trails through the Anecortes Community Forest Lands, an awesome day hike! Get the information you need to explore and protect the Pacific Northwest Trail with free maps, trip planning tools, and the latest information.