



LEFT: Stowe in the Canelo Hills.

ABOVE: Arizona Trail volunteer Zay Hartigan talks with Stowe in Patagonia, a small art community of 800 residents at 4500-foot in the Canelo Hills.

THE GEAR PRIMER

Choose the right gear and know how to use it

PACK A daypack with 20 to 35 liters of capacity should weigh under two pounds. **OUR PICK:** The new Osprey Exos 34 (\$149; ospreypacks.com), which weighs 1 lb 12 oz yet offers handy features like mesh pockets on the hip belt, a mesh back panel to wick sweat, and shoelace-thin compression straps for a compact load.

SLEEPING BAG Without question, down still offers the best warmth-to-weight ratio and the least bulk of any insulating material. By planning to wear all of your clothing to bed, you can slash ounces off your pack weight by taking a higher-temperature-rating sleeping bag. **OUR PICK:** Montbell's Super Stretch Down Hugger sleeping bag series, with temperature ratings from -20° to 35° (\$264-\$549; montbell.us). Elastic baffle stitching helps the bag cinch around the body, eliminating extra air space yet allowing freedom of movement.

SLEEPING PAD A thin three-quarter-length sleeping pad can be supplemented by an empty pack under the feet. **OUR PICK:** Thermarest's new NeoAir inflatable mattress (\$140; thermarest.com), which packs down to the size of a one-liter bottle and weighs 14 oz.

SHELTER For guy-line-savvy runners, a rain poncho can double as a shelter. Two-person, single-wall ultralight tents also work well for two people and weigh around three pounds. **OUR PICKS:** GoLite's Ultra-Lite Poncho/Tarp (\$50; golite.com) is made of a strong silicone-elastomere fabric, doubles as a rain jacket, and has built-in loops for rigging as a shelter. Black Diamond's single-wall, two-person HiLight tent (\$350; bdel.com) is a cinch to set up, with three poles that attach to interior loops. It features a mesh vent to reduce condensation and weighs 3 lbs 2 oz.

TREKKING POLES Trekking poles can ease impact on the joints and are useful for setting up shelters. **OUR PICK:** Black Diamond's carbon-fiber Contour Elliptic Carbon trekking poles (\$160; bdel.com) have flick-lock adjusters, ergonomic handles and Nubuck wrist straps.

FOOTWEAR Without a heavy pack, there's no need for more than a sturdy pair of trail running shoes. **OUR PICK:** The new Montrail Mountain Masochist (\$90; montrail.com) is a beefy trail runner with excellent stability on technical terrain and an airy mesh upper for warm days.

FOOD Bring foods you love—as long as they're dehydrated. The average adult male can refuel on a pound to a pound and a half of dry goods, like nuts, dried fruit, bars, jerky and dehydrated meals each day. **OUR PICK:** For dinner, Backpacker's Pantry (two servings for about \$5.50; backpackerspantry.com) has a new line of organic dehydrated meals like bacon-cheddar mashed potatoes.

STOVE Stoves are optional for summer trips, but for chilly spring and fall nights, warm drinks and eats can be worth the weight of an ultralight stove. **OUR PICK:** The titanium, 1.9-ounce Snow Peak LiteMax Stove (\$55; snowpeak.com) is the lightest stove on the market and barely bigger than a snack-size Snickers.

WATER Bladders and water-treatment pills are the lightest way to manage water in the wilderness. **OUR PICKS:** Platypus BPA-free, 80-ounce bottles (\$10; platypushydration.com) weigh one ounce and collapse when empty. Attach a drinking tube for hydrating on the move. For water treatment, Aquamira Water Purifier Tablets (\$8 for 12; aquamira.com) taste loads better than iodine, kill just as many bugs and weigh next to nothing.

stately ponderosa pine forests, not to mention the Superstition Mountains that soar into the sky east of Phoenix and the blowout finale: the Grand Canyon.

After our two-day trial run, Matt and Agnes fastpacked two other sections of the trail in southern Arizona: one through the White Canyon Wilderness and another through the Superstition Wilderness. They discovered wild diversity, from stretches of buffed, perfectly contoured singletrack to cactus bushwhacks, from towering saguaro forests to narrow sandstone slot canyons.



On our second day, we climbed a hill with views into Mexico, then passed through grasslands resembling the African savannah, populated by wide expanses of wispy bull grass and poetically placed junipers. Later, we dashed past iron-red cliffs rising from bucolic cow pastures, antique windmills creaking in the breeze and spooky forests of mesquite trees clawing the sky. We passed hidden sites where Native Americans etched symbols into the rocks, footpaths Apaches likely roamed and remote streams where native fish still flourish. Amid it all, we glimpsed only one other group of human beings.

There were plenty of signs of wildlife, however. In the afternoon, the four of us, climbing undulating hills in a meditative state of silence, heard a din in the trees. Broken from our reveries, we squinted into the brush then yabbered all at once. Andrew suggested cats, Matt thought raccoons, but after corroborating with the local visitor's center, Agnes had it right: a family of ringtails—quick, fox-like creatures with long striped tails.

At about mile 29, I stood atop a steep