

July 31, Crag's Campground

I've adopted a policy of spending the night before a trip at a campground near the trailhead. Previously, I got up at 4:00 AM and drove to pick up the permit, usually phoning to arrange a late pick-up. Permit in hand, I proceeded to the trailhead and began hiking, reaching a point a few miles up the trail. On that first day, I would go from sea level to the other side of Bishop Pass, Piute Pass, Cottonwood Pass, Kearsarge Pass, or past Roaring River. Consuming sufficient water the day before and the departure day minimized altitude shock.

In 2014, I was diagnosed with atrial fibrillation (irregular heartbeat). My body appreciated spending the night before a trip at a trailhead campground, such as Mosquito Flat, North Lake, Sabrina, or Cedar Grove. With retirement in 2016, the extra day out was no longer an issue.

Camped at trailhead campgrounds, there's a mix of joyous appreciation of each particular place and nervous apprehension about the following day. Along with the normal apprehensions, there's now the question of how will I do on that first day's hike. This one night at a drive-in campground is a combination of joy of camping in the Sierra and dread of the next day.

Here at Crag's Campground by Twin Lakes, probably the worst trailhead campground I've stayed at, there's scattered pines on a brush-covered hillside above my campsite with rugged peaks rising to the west. I arrive late afternoon to full sun covering the picnic table and tent area. By dinner time, one of the scattered pines provides a small amount of shade. Appreciate this particular place, I tell myself, since I doubt I'll be back again.

I enjoy a wonderful sunset walk, following nearby Robinson Creek past Twin Lakes Campground to where the creek exits the eastern Twin Lake. At the lakeshore, the wind blows in strong gusts with white caps churning on the water. The day's final light glows from the snow on one of the distant peaks. It's a quiet evening in the campground even with a couple of family groups. There are only a few tents. It's mainly RVs of various styles and sizes.

I've long wanted to hike Matterhorn Canyon and Spiller Creek Canyon and this may be the one and only time. Appreciate it, all of it, even the annoying parts because all of it will be a magical, one time experience. This is my chance. As the cliché proclaims, seize the day, each day, every day. Do your best not to blow it. It will be memorable.

August 1, Twin Lakes to Crown Lake

Every trip, this first morning gets a little more difficult. I wake up a little after 5:00 and figure I might as well get going. I munch on a couple of blueberry muffins, drink orange juice, and pack, waiting for the ground cover to dry. When the sun arrives, it will dry quickly. A few people are up. One person runs a generator at 6:00. Fortunately, that doesn't last long; they are too far away to know whether someone complained. By 6:30, the sun is shining on the peaks and up Twin Lakes valley.

Once the ground cover dries, I throw out my garbage and drive down the road with Twin Lakes on the left, sparkling in the morning sun. There is a pay phone by Annette's Mono Village café so I call home before setting out. After the "stay safe," "I love you" phone call, I pull up to the stop sign at the gate to enter the Mono Village campground, read the instructions about registering, walk up to the booth, and say I want to park for backpacking. The man asks what is my return date. He writes down August 8 and asks for \$10. I hand him the ten dollar bill I've saved for this purpose. He gives me a post-it sticker to put on the rear or front window, depending on how I park, explaining they need to be able to see it while driving through checking the parking lot. He tells me the backpacker parking is at the far end with a sign declaring "Backpacker Parking."

Turning around, I drive to the parking lot and find a backpacker space in the shade, unload my pack and camera, lock the car, and hoist on the camera and pack. A sign on the right end of the parking lot points to "trailhead." This leads to a maze of dirt roads winding through hundreds of campsites. Since I see no signs indicating where to go for the actual trailhead, I head back to the registration

booth and ask directions. The man tells me to walk past the chain on the road, follow the road to where it ends in a trail, and look for the Barney Lake sign. I soon see a sign saying “Barney Lake” pointing up a dirt road that leads to a chain across the road. Walking past the overflow camping, the dirt road becomes a path through the forest towards a sign saying “Barney Lake” pointing to the right. A man is walking his dog and has day-hiked to Barney many times. He gives me a detailed description of the trail to Barney. I soon arrive at the Hoover Wilderness signs, informing me this is the correct direction.

The hike up to Barney is uneventful, conforming to the man’s description. The trail passes through a large beautiful meadow with Little Slide Canyon rising to the left and mountains straight ahead. I enjoy the changing views as the trail climbs out of the canyon. Reaching Barney Lake, there’s a large group stopped for a break. As the trail passes above the water, my eyes on the lake’s beautiful setting with cliffs and peaks rising behind, I meet a solo hiker coming down. He complains about the horrendous mosquitoes at Peeler Lake, saying they are almost as bad as Alaska.

On the climb above Barney, I am passed by a friendly family. When I tell them I am going to Spiller Creek Canyon, they respond that they went up it a couple of years ago. When we part at the Peeler Junction, the father gives me a detailed description of the route up Spiller Creek and lauds the canyon’s beauty and solitude.

The trail zigs and zags through piles of rocks, talus, and lovely forest to Robinson Lakes. This part of northern Yosemite is unique. There’s lots of granite in all shapes and sizes with the path constructed to bypass the haphazard piles of rock. Cutting in between the two Robinson Lakes, there’s a simple creek crossing before passing above the second lake. Below Crown Lake, I come across the first snow. There’s a large snowfield on the trail below the lake with a couple of footprint paths over the snow. Above and to the left of the trail is a small ridge overlooking the lake with a campsite. There’s a good breeze blowing that I hope will discourage mosquitoes. The campsites on the northeast shore require wading the outlet creek and are out of the wind. I wonder if I should have stayed at Robinson, but the bugs were bad there, too, and there was no wind.

The sun sinks below the ridge, sending the campsite into shadow while Crown Point remains in sunlight. After dinner, I enjoy taking photos though the conditions and light are not the best. By 7:00 I'm ready to get in the tent to get out of the bugs. I have the headnet on and it's covered with mosquitoes; seeing anything is a view through mesh covered in black dots. I enjoy the days final light on Crown Point before finally taking refuge in the tent, swatting the mosquitoes that succeed in getting inside. It has not a particularly great day, but then, I tell myself, neither was the first day of my last trip. Tomorrow will be better.

August 2, Crown Lake to Upper Matterhorn Canyon

The first light falls on Crown Point. By 6:40, the tent is down. I am anxious to get out of here and reach Matterhorn Canyon. In between, there are two passes and seven miles of walking, some of it over deep snow. Today may be the hardest day. I have to be ready for anything. One thing about this trip is that it is unknown since I have never been here. It is the unknown that worries me, especially today. If I get through today, the rest should be easier.

Above Crown Lake, I walk by a beautiful small meadow. At the Rock Island Pass junction, the trail turns left and comes to a creek crossing, which this year requires a short wade. The trail heads up to the left and disappears under snow. I head up snow-free rocks and come across the trail going diagonally left to right, disappearing under snow and reappearing about twenty feet away in more rocks. The warm sun shines on the hard snow so I am able to do kick steps across the steep slope to reach the rocks and trail on the other side. The trail disappears and reappears in snow as it ascends towards a stand of pines. The path winds among the trees before descending slightly to a lovely lake by a beautiful meadow with at least three different paths through a bog. I chose the driest of the pathways going towards the single pathway that angles up a small ridge. Below the ridge, the trail passes over a wide flat and up another short ridge. At the top, a metal sign announces I am entering Yosemite National Park.

Previous hikers have chosen numerous ways over the patches of snow covering portions of the trail. The rocky path heads north and then east to circumvent cliffs and rocks before dropping down and heading south. As I make my way down the zig-zagging trail, I meet a group climbing up. They are heading to Crown Lake so I warn them about the horrendous mosquitoes. At the bottom of the descent, the trail heads east. I hop a small creek and stop for lunch. This is a gorgeous timberline landscape. I realize this is where I will head north to Little Slide Canyon on my return journey.

After lunch, I walk down a series of long switchbacks. Through the trees, Slide Canyon's humongous talus pile is visible to the south. I worry about having to climb back up as I descend the switchbacks. The trail heads east then ascends through forest, fords a small creek, and climbs to a lovely boggy meadow. The Sawtooths form a spectacular jagged northern horizon. A woman comes down the trail; we exchange greetings and wish each other good trips.

Beyond the boggy meadow, the trail turns south to head up to the plateau below Burro Pass. The path winds over the plateau and begins ascending the pass before disappearing under deep snow. There are several sets of tracks heading up through the snow along with glissading slides down. Since I have never been over this pass, it's guesswork to determine the exact location of the top. I head up through rocks. At one point, the trail reappears before disappearing again under snow. Fortunately, the snow is mushy so heading straight up following a set of footprints is easy. At the top, the snow abruptly stops. The south side of the pass is snow free. I wonder how much of the snow will remain when returning in five days. I look for the trail down and find it about ten feet to the left of where my snowy climb concluded. Finding a place to rest my pack, I take in the magnificent view. Matterhorn Peak rises to the left and Finger Peaks to the right. Below, a fairytale timberline landscape spreads out, extending far down to the massive ridge of Doghead and Quarry peaks.

Before putting my pack on, I attempt to pick out a place to camp somewhere near the silvery ribbon of Matterhorn Creek. A couple of places

appear promising, but I need to be closer to make a real choice. The trail down from the pass is a dizzying zig-zag until it nears the floor of the canyon. The path heads south, disappearing behind a small ridge rising from the canyon floor. The pines are denser further down and I want to camp here in the upper portion of the canyon. Along with the aesthetic advantages, I assume the mosquitoes will be worse further down in the trees. I head east towards Matterhorn Creek seeking a campsite.

After a few minutes of searching, I find a clear flat area in the rock shelves on the east side above the creek. This will be wonderful. There's a wide open view extending from Finger Peaks and the Sawtooth ridge to Matterhorn Peak with the massive ridge of Whorl Mountain to the east and Quarry Peak to the south. After setting up the tent and dinner, I explore the area up and down the creek with its fascinating rock formations in all directions. The extent and diversity of the colorful wildflowers draws my attention and awe of the overwhelming beauty of timberline during peak bloom.

I end this satisfying day watching the light fade on Matterhorn Peak and the Sawtooth ridge. This is everything I hoped for and more. High Sierra serenity settles in as I dwell in a state of grace.

August 3, Upper Matterhorn Canyon to Miller Lake,

I observe the day's first light travel up the canyon, transforming the rocks, boulders, grass, and trees. This upper canyon below Burro Pass is a timberline wonderland. Whitebarks are scattered amidst green grass, shrubs, bushes, and varying sizes and shapes of boulders and glacial erratics.

I feel justified with this campsite. Yes, it's only a flat area where no plants are growing in the space for a tent, but it has a great view of the upper canyon. This is the wide open serene timberline that reaches into my soul and tells me I'm glad to be alive. On Wednesday I'll get another chance to be here in the upper canyon, to see it and experience it. However, that will be while hiking through, not sitting and looking intensely, discerning each rock, each tree.

Just revel in the journey, each and every step. Take it all in. This is my chance to experience Matterhorn Canyon. This is the place I've never been that surprises people when asking where I've backpacked and hiked in the Sierra. I may have traveled most trails and many cross-country routes from Cottonwood Pass in the south to Virginia Pass in the north, but never in Matterhorn Canyon. Now I am here and it is living up to the hype.

Today, I hike the canyon until the PCT junction. It will be interesting to see if there are more people. So far, I've seen no one since the lone hiker yesterday. The two days of this trip are a total of fifteen miles and that has been two seven hour days. I used to hike fifteen miles or more in a single seven hour day. I'll see how I do today. If I'm at Miller Lake by 2:00 then I'm moving along just fine, if much slower. Well, it's time to put it to the test: down Matterhorn Canyon after so many years of gazing at it on the map and wondering.

After intersecting the trail, the first part of the hike is enthralling. Quarry Peak looms ahead with Matterhorn Creek passing over rock slabs and waterfalls on its descent through downed trees and scrub bushes. The trail passes into forest and I look for possible campsites on my return journey. I come to the first crossing of the creek. After switching shoes, I wade across and end up further to the right than intended due to the depth of the water and height of the bank on the other side. At first, I fail to locate the trail due to downed trees to the left. By looking back, I see where the regular low-water crossing strikes the other side. Making my way over to the trail, I decide to stop here by the rocks above the creek for an early lunch.

After lunch, the trail continues down the canyon, Quarry Peak looming straight above as the canyon narrows. I come to another creek-wade crossing soon followed by yet another, the last of three crossings of Matterhorn Creek. The trail journeys farther from the water as it winds down through forest. I am now eager to see the signs indicating the junction with the Pacific Crest Trail. When I arrive at the collection of signs, I take off my pack and check the time: 1:00.

While I met no one all morning hiking down Matterhorn Canyon, once climbing the PCT, I'm soon meeting people. Two women are following the

route I took the other direction through Burro Pass, Mule Pass, and Barney Lake. I pass on what information I can. A man says nothing, only raising his hand in a hello wave as he passes by heading down. There's a magnificent view of lower Matterhorn Canyon and the long extending ridge of an unnamed peak from a trailside overlook. The trail switchbacks up to a ridge and winds around it. At an overlook to the north towards Whorl Mountain and Matterhorn Peak, two friendly women sit admiring the view from a rock shelf above the trail. As I head down, I pass one man who asks how are you. When I reply, "Good, almost there," he responds "Miller, yeah." As the water of Miller Lake appears ahead, the trail skirts the edge of a lovely meadow. Two couples are stopped at the lake taking a long rest. I realize I should try and find a campsite with wind to blow away mosquitoes so camping at the sites in the trees on the west shore is not a good idea. I look for a place above the lake amid the rocks above the northeast shore. A use trail takes me to a large campsite above the lake with a breeze blowing. It's a long way down to the water, but that's a small inconvenience compared to the breeze and view.

Miller Lake is bigger and more beautiful than imagined. There are cliffs on one side with a lovely beach on the north shore where I enjoy a brief skinny-dip dunk in the lake since no one seems to be around at the moment.

After dinner, I go down to the lake to take photos before the sun disappears behind the ridge. A woman sits writing in a journal by the shore. Two men search for a campsite along the west shore. After I take photos of the light on the meadow, the two men decide to ignore the vacant campsites on the west shore and pitch their two tents about twenty feet from the lake on the green meadowgrass. One takes a selfie of himself by the tent with the lake as the background. I consider telling them it's illegal to camp there, but they are half my age, nearly twice my size, and obviously don't care about rules. Playing cop and putting myself at personal risk to lecture strangers about leave-no-trace principles does not seem wise, so I ignore them.

Returning to my campsite, the last light on the nearby rocks is spectacular. The high clouds transform to iridescent pink and red mirrored on the still water. Down at the lakeshore, I revel in the sunset despite the

voracious mosquitoes that cause me to wear a headnet. When darkness begins, I retreat to the tent.

I've been staring at maps and contemplating visiting trailless Spiller Creek Canyon since Gordon, Barbara, and I camped along Return Creek in upper Virginia Canyon in 1989. After thirty years, tomorrow I finally make it to Spiller Creek Canyon.

August 4, Miller Lake to Upper Spiller Creek Canyon

It's a beautiful sunrise with a few clouds reflected on the still water of Miller Lake. The cloud show increases as the morning progresses, as do the mosquitoes.

Today is the trip's culmination in Spiller Creek Canyon. The cross-country travel should be interesting if not particularly difficult in terms of route finding. It's matter of simply following the creek and heading north to the upper canyon. I remind myself to use the technology (GPS) and paper maps along with my instincts. However, today I'm going to primarily follow those instincts; see where they take me and rejoice in the discovery. Now it's good-bye to Miller Lake, a wonderful, better than expected surprise.

Walking over the meadow above the beach, I strike the rutted trail. Soon, I am in forest, passing by the small lakes on the topo map. The trail winds over a relatively level ridge before descending once again and making its way up to another relatively level ridge with lovely rock formations. Views of Whorl Mountain, Matterhorn Peak, and Spiller Creek Canyon appear through the trees. A series of long switchbacks winds down to Spiller Creek. I dread the thought of having to come back up this stretch. Reaching the bottom, I hear the sounds of Spiller Creek. The trail passes alongside the creek until it comes to the crossing. Switching shoes, I wade the wide creek and find a nice log on the other side to switch back to hiking shoes. There are a couple of empty campsites on this far side. A use trail heads past the campsites up the canyon. I come to a spectacular section of the creek with falls rushing over granite. Stopping for a snack, I run through what the family I met on the

first day told me about going up the canyon: when the area along the creek narrows, head up and over in order to avoid bushwhacking.

A faint use trail continues up the canyon before disappearing. After awhile, the canyon narrows. I climb up, keeping the sound of the creek within earshot. There must have been a massive blow-down a few years ago since the ground is littered with dead trees about the same size and age. Picking a way through the trees lying haphazardly requires paying attention to each step. The other side of the creek is more open so I look for a rock hop crossing, but finally decide to wade across at a shallow area. The walking is easier here on the creek's west side.

I begin to anticipate reaching the canyon's upper magnificence, hoping that the pines finally give way and the peaks appear. I first glimpse Stanton Peak and Gray Butte through the pines, only increasing the anticipation. When I finally emerge out of the trees to witness the view from Gray Butte to Stanton Peak to Virginia Peak to the jagged ridge rising nearly straight up for two thousand feet, I am stuck in my tracks, beholding this singular magnificence. All the walking, all the struggle is rewarded.

On the west side, there are now only scattered stands of whitbarks, while the east side of the creek contains thicker stands of mixed conifers. I continue walking up the canyon aiming towards a small stand of whitebarks. This upper section of the canyon is truly magnificent, distinctive. The pines that fill the eastern side of the canyon become whitebarks that decrease in number the higher one goes. The east side looks as if it may be better for a campsite, but as I walk, the area that looked promising turns out to not be a good place to camp. When I reach the first stand of whitebarks I was aiming for, I continue walking. A quarter mile or so further up looks more promising.

When I arrive at a small stand of whitebarks with giant erratics, I see what has obviously been used previously as a campsite. This will do just fine. Virginia Peak rises on the other side of the creek with the massive ridge of Twin Peaks extending north while Stanton Peak and Gray Butte rise to the southeast.

Tomorrow I will not take the planned layover day. Long switchbacking climbs wear me down so I sometimes want to stop right then and there, not another step. But I take the next step and all the steps after. There is still sufficient stamina to keep going. It's just slow going, much slower. I doubt if I can make it down the canyon, climb up to Miller Lake, and make it up Matterhorn Canyon in one day without exhausting myself. When I was younger, this would be easily done. Now, the climbs will wipe me out after negotiating the three to four hours to descend Spiller Creek Canyon. Tomorrow afternoon, I'll go back down the canyon and camp at the spectacular falls above the PCT junction.

I eat early and take the camera and tripod to see "around the corner," so to speak, to the upper end of Spiller Creek Canyon. Leaving before 5:30, I walk further than expected, beyond "around the corner" to where I'm slightly below the final climb to Horse Creek Pass and Matterhorn Peak. It's a once in a lifetime exploration. The entire walk is magnificent in the wide open final mile of Spiller Creek Canyon. The peaks and ridges shine in the evening light; the creek cascades down in a series of small waterfalls.

I arrive back in the vicinity of my campsite as the day's last light glows on Matterhorn, Virginia, and Stanton peaks. Wispy clouds transform to iridescent pink sky as a new moon hangs in the darkening sky. Time seems to stop momentarily, transfixed in the here-and-now. Spiller Creek is the only sound in the still quiet of descending darkness. The machinations of the outside human world seem petty, even irrelevant, in this timeless wilderness.

The last words I write as darkness engulfs the canyon are "Fabulous day!"

August 5, Upper Spiller Creek Canyon to Lower Spiller Creek Canyon

The sun doesn't make it from behind Virginia Peak until the latest possible time. The rest of the lower canyon is sparkling in sunshine while this part remains in shade even at 8:45. Since I have the morning off, I enjoy watching the light's progress down the cliffs of Whorl Mountain and the ridges to the south where a massive unnamed peak shines in full sun.

There's such a singular beauty to this place, a singularity increased by its isolation. This campsite is obvious only for the level area that contained a tent. I have not seen a fire ring. There's almost no indication of humans ever passing through, not even a faint trace of a use trail. It feels like undiscovered country. Having to negotiate miles of cross-country discourages visitors. All those who pass through the junction of the PCT with Spiller Creek do not know what wonders exist a few miles away. That's true for all High Sierra major trails. As spectacular as they are, there are magnificent wonders off-trail in every direction that offer transcendent solitude.

Now, in the morning's glory, I am thinking I have to return: Green Creek or Virginia Lakes to Summit Lake to Virginia Canyon to the part of upper Spiller Creek Canyon walked to yesterday evening. It's two days, possibly three, and not particularly difficult. What would it be like in late September? Leaving this place in a little more than two hours will be difficult. The thought I may return aids the leaving. Maybe it isn't forever?

What of those places to be seen only once? There are too many memorable places and too little time left. Brewer Basin is etched indelibly in my memory, as well as Red Devil Lake. Those were last year's one-time-only experiences. A few years ago, there was Lakes Basin with two nights at a Marion Lake and an entire day wandering the upper portion of the basin. I now know I can no longer manage the 5,000 foot climb out of the Kings Canyon that first day. Though age and health issues may prevent me from returning to many places, I can rejoice in the memory. At least, I was truly there, even if only once.

So when I pack up and leave in a couple of hours, I will retain my memories of this place. While I may return, I also know this single set of memories is sufficient. For now, I'll finish my coffee and explore the amazing diversity of flowers here in upper Spiller Creek Canyon. It continues to be memorable.

After lunch, the walk down is a joy since there's no time pressure. The sky is cloudy and thinking of being threatening. After building up into a possibility, the clouds began to thin out and blue sky appears in the gaps between clouds. Soon it is a typical High Sierra summer afternoon.

Once down to the forested area, I need to pay better attention to anticipate where to pass among the trees, which is compounded by the remnants of the massive blow down. I step over or around dozens of fallen trees. I surprise two deer, a large buck and then a large doe another half mile or so further down. I startle each of them as they feed in what they thought was threat-free solitude. Otherwise, I traipse over meadows and pass between trees.

I arrive at the cascades above the PCT junction. No one is here. I check out all the possible campsites in the area and find an ideal one on Spiller Creek alongside the cascades, trees separating this area from the obviously heavily used campsites by the junction.

I take a swim in the “bathtub” created by the overflowing cascades. The remainder of this idyllic afternoon is spent writing, drinking Crystal Light lemonade, and appreciating this location only a quarter mile from the PCT.

As I wander around the area taking photos, the ball head on the tripod comes apart from the tripod itself. The connecting screw on the ball head needs to be adjusted. The repair requires a pair of sturdy pliers, something I do not carry backpacking. I will need to adjust the ISO settings on the camera for each photo rather than using ISO 200 with the tripod keeping the camera steady on low light exposures.

The evening proceeds as the sunlight peeks around the ridge and slants down the canyon on the trees and creek. The waterfall contains a small waterwheel, a mini-version of the more grandiose Le Conte and Waterwheel Falls in Tuolumne Canyon. Another tranquil pink sunset radiates in the clouds. The multitudinous sounds of Spiller Creek sing me to sleep.

August 6, Lower Spiller Creek Canyon to Matterhorn Canyon

“Here comes the sun.” This morning it feels like the George Harrison song. These are the moments that sustain me through the long winters. Spiller Creek cascades by with the cliffs of the canyon above, the sunlight shining on the cliffs and now the other side of the creek, soon to be here on this side.

There is something almost primeval about rushing water over granite slabs, an aesthetic unity, a captivating beauty. The white rapids and slower moving clear water pass over granite with the slabs on all sides of the water, a few tiny green whitebarks growing out of the expansive gray granite. One could spend a day sitting by the creek mesmerized by the myriad changes in the moving water. Being able to camp here made losing the layover day palatable. I have remained in total solitude two full days. The junction may be a few hundred yards away, but it might as well be a mile.

The contemplation of what I assume will be a hard day is slightly alarming. I figure the day has four humps to climb. The first and most difficult is from Spiller Creek to the level area on the ridge. The second is the shorter climb to the ridge above Miller Lake. The third is the short climb beyond Miller to the ridge above Matterhorn Canyon and the fourth is the climb up Matterhorn Canyon. I want to get past the third and final crossing of Matterhorn Creek to the more wide open portion of the canyon.

Wearing my Reeboks, I walk to the crossing, step into the water, and am quickly on the other side. After changing to hiking shoes, around 9:00 I begin hiking the first hump. About half-way up, I meet one hiker descending. Nearing the top, I am startled from my slow climbing reverie by a young man behind me who passes me as if I'm standing still.

"Sorry, you startled me," I pant as I get out of his way.

"Look behind you," he gestures back to the view of Matterhorn Peak. He's not referring to my lack of awareness of him, but the view.

Turning around, I manage an "Oh yeah!" at the lovely view as the young man disappears up the trail.

I walk in solitude on the level traverse before the shorter climb that takes me to the top of the ridge, passes rock cliffs and one stunning meadow, before a short descent past the two small lakes before reaching Miller Lake. Following the deep rutted path across the meadow to the lake's point, I put down my pack. I explore along the sand beach past the lush meadow to the western shore before sitting by the water at the point, appreciating this beautiful place in solitude for the first and last time.

Following the easy third hump, I'm down the switchbacks to the junction at 11:45. I run into a large group of fifteen who say they are going to Tuolumne Meadows, resupply, and go out for two more weeks. I have lunch at the final crossing, the same place as on the way down. In solitude, I decide to go until about 2:30 or 3:00 and see where I am. This part of the climb is delightful, an easy upward grade except for a couple of brief steeper exceptions. At the set of campsites on the other side of the trail and creek, I keep walking. Coming to a great site on the creek I saw on the way down, no one is around. I'll stop here. I'm far enough up the canyon to see Matterhorn Peak, the Sawtooths, and even Burro Pass, which a lone hiker is descending. I couldn't have asked for better. Today was a lot easier than expected.

After a dip in the creek, I sit leaning on a log with a grand view of upper Matterhorn Canyon, watching the light as it move across Finger Peaks, the Sawtooths, and Matterhorn Peak. I wander up the trail and climb up the rocks to get a better view up and down the canyon. I appreciate the singular beauty of this view up the canyon. There is a marvelous aesthetic unity with Finger Peaks, the Sawtooths, Matterhorn Peak, and Whorl Mountain. Except for the well-worn trail, this feels like pristine, isolated wilderness. The clouds morph through fascinating changes. At sunset, they transform into scintillating shades of red, creating a spellbinding conclusion to a transcendent day.

After darkness, I drift off into satisfied sleep.

August 7, Matterhorn Canyon to Ice Lake Pass

It's cloudy at dawn with the clouds dissipating as the morning progresses. This is the last place to receive the morning sun, as in upper Spiller Creek Canyon. I can see the distant pines glowing before the sun arrives in this section of the canyon. Above me, sunlight shines on the canyon's cliffs and to the north, Finger Peaks and Matterhorn Peak are beckoning beacons.

I definitely experienced Matterhorn Canyon. It is wonderful to hike it both directions. There is a fascinating different perception when going up versus heading down, an affirmation of it's the journey itself that matters

most. The lower canyon feels like walking between massive cliffs with little to see up ahead. It's a forest hike, though the forest is not dense. The creek is a pleasant distraction, the sound of the water over the rocks a meditative conjurer of thoughts. Going down, one begins to feel hemmed in, eager to reach the junction signs.

Heading up the canyon, the lower section does not feel so hemmed in after the forest trekking of the previous miles. The canyon's high cliffs feel more magnificent than on the descent. The meadow between the second and final creek crossing opens up one's perspective of the surroundings. Once crossing the creek for the last time, the view ahead gradually grows larger and grander. Above this campsite, the canyon opens up and the distant peaks dominate the view.

Today I go to below Ice Lake Pass, at least, that's the goal. Maybe there will be a chance to see over the top of Little Slide Canyon and learn what's possible in terms of going down the canyon? Compared to going over Mule Pass and down past Barney Lake, Little Slide Canyon is a lot shorter distance to walk and probably without boring stretches. First, I need to get up Matterhorn Canyon and over Burro Pass, down to the creek, and up the switchbacks to the creek crossing where I will head cross country.

The walk up Matterhorn Canyon is even more delightful than yesterday's hike. The views of Finger Peaks and Matterhorn Peak encourage me as they grow nearer with every step. The creek is always in sight as the trail winds up through an enchanting timberline landscape. The trees grow less dense and give way to scattered whitebarks. The area I camped in four nights ago seems even lovelier and more remote than I remember. On the final climb, the trail curlicues its way up to the pass, causing me to joke to myself about getting dizzy if I could manage to walk faster.

The snow remains at the top of the pass. Taking a short break, I enjoy the magnificent view down Matterhorn Canyon one final time. With the pack back on, I step onto the snow and walk across, then veer right down to the rocks climbed up five days ago. The way down over the rocks is now snow-free with the trail diagonalling down until it meets another snowfield. From there, I cut across and down to where the trail is once more visible as it heads

down to the lush valley with the Sawtooth ridge rising above. In many ways, this is an ideal timberline landscape with its scattered whitebarks, vibrant green meadows, and picturesque jagged peaks.

After crossing the creek and passing over a bog, I stop off-trail on some rocks. When I look behind me, someone is running down the trail. He soon passes me, wearing only a daypack. I surmise he's running all the way to Twin Lakes today. A little further on, there's a beautiful campsite in the large rocks above the creek where I stop for lunch. I think I'm making decent time today. After lunch, I go down through the forest, follow along the ridge, and begin hiking up the switchbacks. The grade is good so I walk at almost a normal pace. I realize I'm on the last long switchback to the creek crossing. From there, I turn right and head cross country to Ice Lake Pass. The way to the pass is fairly obvious. Soon, I am walking in a timberline wonderland. A couple of snowmelt tarns sit beside a couple of marvelous campsites. I can camp here if I can see a way down the pass.

Going up through the rocks, from a vantage point above and to the left, the pass itself resides under deep snow and ice. Below the snow, there is a clear use trail that heads towards unfrozen Ice Lake, then up and over the cliffs above. So how to reach the use trail?

From the vantage point, I see a small snowfield heading down. Walking to the top of the snowfield, there is a clear passageway by the rocks on one side that take one down towards Ice Lake and the use trail. I've found a way down.

Black and gray thunderheads are moving this way. Turning back, I head towards the tarns with the campsites, erect the tent, and wait for the storm to come. Within minutes, raindrops fall as swirling winds intensify. Going in the tent, I feel a pelt of hail. Once inside, I lie on the sleeping bag and listen to the hail pummel the tent for the next fifteen to twenty minutes. The hail switches to the pitter-patter of light rain. When the plops on the tent stop, I emerge to take in my surroundings.

I see no signs here denoting Hoover Wilderness or Yosemite. Nature does not recognize a boundary between Hoover Wilderness and Yosemite National Park. One simply walks north and unless one looks at a map, one has no idea

of leaving a national park and entering a national forest. It is all one wilderness. Human jurisdictional demarcations seem irrelevant.

After dinner, I wander this fairyland area. The views to the south of the ridges and mountains of north Yosemite are magnificent. Amid billowing clouds, it's still bright sunshine on the rock formations above me and to the south for miles and miles. As the sun sends shafts of light on the Incredible Hulk and the massive ridge to its right, I am enthralled. The clouds transform into another magnificent red-pink sunset—sailor's delight.

When darkness comes, I reluctantly get in the tent due to the annoying mosquitoes. I'm nervous and excited about tomorrow. Once I'm through that bit in the beginning of getting to the use trail, I'm hoping while it will be hard, it won't be crazy making. What a trip. I can't take this all in yet. It will take time to absorb it all.

August 8, Ice Lake Pass to Mammoth Hospital

I'm up at dawn on this final morning in a true wonderland, an awesomely beautiful place with rocks, boulders, tarns, and a few scattered whitbarks. Now is my last time to appreciate this phantasmal place. I wish I would appreciate it more. My anxiety about descending Little Slide Canyon impedes it.

There's mystery about this place, perhaps because it feels so uninhabited. Besides no other humans, there are no other creatures except mosquitoes—no pikas or marmots even though this seems an ideal habitat. The silence is like nothing I've ever experienced—no birds flitting about, no running water. I found it difficult to get to sleep because of the silence. The buzzing of mosquitoes is the only sound. Otherwise it is complete, utter silence. Any sound I make feels like a violation of something sacred.

It's time to leave this land of silence and return to the cacophony of civilization. I've hiked the miles and they've been gorgeous miles. I truly was in Matterhorn Canyon; both nights were unique and special. There was only one night in the upper canyon of Spiller Creek, but the creek itself was spectacular and the solitude heightened the second night. I'd like to return.

Now it's time to break the silence, pack up, and head home. Usually the last day is a simple returning with no surprises. That's what's different about today. It is a complete unknown, but hopefully with no rolling stones, to paraphrase Bob Dylan. If I get back to the car, then I accomplished what I set out to do this trip.

Even when I think I'm moving through the chores more quickly, it seems to still result in roughly the same time of departure. I leave the campsite at 8:40.

I need to find the way discovered yesterday to get around the snow and ice of the pass. At first, I head too close to the pass itself and reach a dead end. Turning back, I head around the rock formation to my left and find the correct route with the snowfield on my right and the cliff on the left with its narrow snow-free gap to the bottom. Once at the bottom, I walk over a patch of snow and put the pack on one of the large rocks to look for the use trail seen from above. About five feet from the rock, I discover the path.

Following the use trail, I begin climbing above Ice Lake. The trail diverges in a couple of different paths and I choose one to follow. As the path goes over rocks, I lose it temporarily, but it always reappears. It leads down towards Maltby Lake then slightly back up before a steep descent. The trail winds through rocks and reaches a large snowfield heading steeply down. There is a snow-free way along a cliff, similar to the one used earlier by Ice Lake Pass. About half-way down, there's a cliff about four to five feet high, too far a plunge for me and the pack. I take off the pack and negotiate my way down the plunge. Putting the pack back on, I twist around a corner and reach a dead end. The snow is now even with my head. What to do since I can't go forward and can't go back?

I take off the pack, stand on a rock, and peer over the edge of the snow. It's about ten feet to the bottom, but it's too steep to walk down with the pack. I need to get the pack to the bottom and do kick steps down without the extra weight of the pack sending me uncontrollably sliding. Tying a rope chord on to the pack, I lift it up over the edge of the snow and give it a push. The pack goes about three or four feet before stopping out of reach. Now what? I'm now stuck here without a pack.

I head back to the plunge I'd climbed down, climb up, and step on the snowfield. I kick-step over the snow to the pack. When I reach it, I give the pack a push and it zooms down to the bottom. I slowly kick-step my way down until about three or four feet above the bottom when I slip and glissade down.

With the pack back on, the use trail reappears after a few steps. I hear the distant voices of climbers negotiating the Incredible Hulk. Following the now prominent use trail, I come to their campsite, call out to see if anyone is around. There's no answer. Crossing a short snowfield, the use trail continues on the other side.

Soon, I come to another snowfield. A creek descends cliffs on the left and curves around the edge of the snowfield. The snow is about twenty level yards across with rocks on the other side above the creek. The creek and the snowfield then head down to the right. I spy what appears to be a duck on the rocks above the creek. I decide to cross the level snowfield, step over the narrow creek, and get up on the rocks by the duck. There I will have lunch before doing the final steep descent down the canyon to intersect with the Barney Lake Trail. It's about 12:30.

Stepping onto the snow, I make my across towards the creek. Nearing the other side, I realize the snow is undercut by the creek and hanging unsupported over the edge of the water. I immediately lie down on the snow to better distribute my weight before I will crawl to my right and stand up to find a safer route to the rocks.

All those thoughts race through my mind in a split second as I lie down on the snow. Instantly, I feel myself sliding uncontrollably to my left, plunging down several feet and whamming onto a rock in the creek. It all happens in a slow-motion second, a second imprinted forever in my memory.

Water rushes over me with the rock directly in front of me, my face touching the cold, wet surface. My eyeglass have flown off. Blood spurts. I can't stand up. My entire left side screams in excruciating pain. I pull off the scarf around my neck and place it on my face to apply direct pressure. Is my nose broken? No, it just hurts like hell. The scarf is covered in blood, but the bleeding now seems less severe.

I tell myself “don’t panic.” This truism from *A Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy* provides the needed levity. Lying with water rushing over me, I tell myself to figure out what I need to do next. The rational side of my brain takes over. *Deal with each needed action one step at a time.*

I pull out the SPOT X from the camera case, rip off the cover of the SOS button, and push the button. I don’t even think twice before sending the SOS. There is no way I’m getting out of Little Slide Canyon without help.

Once I send the SOS, I know I must get out of the creek. Immobilized, shivering in the ice cold water, and feeling that shock might be setting in, thoughts of Randy Morgenson flash through my mind: *I am not going to die here.*

The trekking pole is still by my right hand. Gripping it, sticking it on the creek bottom, and pulling up on it, I raise myself to a standing position. Turning, I sit down with the pack resting on the rock. Despite the pain on my left side, especially my shoulder, I manage to get the pack off by loosening both straps and sliding out my arms. The pack stays in place on the rock. By ducking my head and using my right arm, the camera bag lifts off. I take out the emergency whistle from the front stretch pocket of the camera bag.

With my impaired eyesight making everything a fuzzy blur, I limp a few steps in the creek until reaching a place I can crawl up, get on dry ground, and lie back on a rock. I continue shivering uncontrollably and wonder again about shock. Running my tongue over my teeth due to the bleeding, I realize some of the front ones are broken and cracked.

After a few deep breaths to collect myself as well as I can, I begin blowing on the whistle in blasts of three. I wonder if anyone will hear it due to the wind blowing so hard. What else can I do? With no alternative, I continue tooting. For the next fifteen to twenty minutes I do periodic versions of the three SOS blasts on the whistle, though the pain makes it difficult.

Two figures appear on the rocks above. They heard the whistle. They realize I am in distress. The man and woman race down, jabbering in a language I don’t understand. They speak to me in English as they see my bloody face and immobility. The man yanks his sleeping pad off his pack

and together they place it behind me to lie on. I tell them my pack is on the rock in the creek and say the camera bag is also there and declare it is more important than the pack.

The man fetches the pack and the woman the camera. She opens the pack. She doesn't bother asking where the sleeping bag is. She lifts out the Bearikade, pulls out the tent, and then the sleeping bag. She yanks the sleeping bag from its stuff sack and they place it tenderly over my shivering body. They obviously know how to treat a victim who may be going into shock. I feel I've been discovered by a pair of guardian angels.

Up to this point, no one has said much of anything. Now, as we talk, they obviously assessing how coherent I am, I learn they are from Patagonia in Chile, here to climb the Incredible Hulk. They tell me their names, but I forget them in my current condition. I say I sent an SOS. They make it clear they will not leave me until help arrives. I am astounded by their generosity and kindness. These two people have restored any loss of faith in human nature.

As I am showing them the SPOT X, I realize it is asking for a text reply. I type "Little Slide Canyon. Can't move. With 2 climbers. Need help" and hit send. Trying to make out the keys on the SPOT causes me to remember the spare pair of glasses in my pack. After forty years of carrying, I now need them. I instruct the couple as to where the glasses are stored in the pack and they retrieve them, placing them gently on my face. Now I can see my surroundings, which consist of the creek and snowfield to my immediate right, an assortment of rocks before me and heading up on my left, and diagonally up to the right, the Incredible Hulk rising towards the sky.

I am still shivering though I no longer feel as if I may be about to go into shock. I ask them to get out my polartec jacket from the pack. Getting it on me is extremely difficult with my shoulder in excruciating pain. They manage to remove the outer down jacket I'm wearing, get my inured left arm into the fleece sleeve, and bring the jacket around behind me so my right arm goes in the other sleeve. We do the same procedure to get the down jacket back on as I wince and suppress a scream.

The couple and I chat and I tell them what happened with the fall. As we are talking, next to the duck on the rocks above, two figures appear. They look down and quickly realize this is not three people simply taking a rest break. Two men, aged late twenties or early thirties, immediately offer any assistance they possibly can, including going back down to the trailhead to fetch help. Once again, any loss of faith in human nature is restored.

I tell them about sending the SPOT message so help should be informed and on the way. I also attempt to send Barbara a text message to tell her I'm injured, but with four people who are helping me. One of the men asks to see the SPOT and takes it up to the top of the rocks to push the SOS again from the better vantage point. Soon, I hear a helicopter; so does everyone else. It flies over us and all four of them jump up and down and wave hats and jackets. The helicopter does not pause.

One of the men attempts to send a text message to Search and Rescue. It is now past 3:00. The wind is swirling in the canyon so flying a helicopter to this location may not be possible. That means any rescue may come on foot and thus hours away. My four guardians pass the time talking to me and each other. I try to explain my rangefinder camera to one of the men. The couple from Patagonia discuss how they will climb the Incredible Hulk. These four people are stopping their lives in order to save mine. For some reason, maybe my guardians' reassuring presence, maybe my conscious repetition of "don't panic," I remain calm and accepting of my circumstances and fate. As I keep telling myself, what else can I do? I'm too immobilized to take any action.

Someone picks up the sound of a helicopter. I see it pass overhead, pause, and drop down slightly. All four of my guardians stand on the rocks above waving jackets and pointing down to where I am lying. The helicopter flies away. One of the men says he made eye contact with the pilot. Now past 4:00, I realize we are chasing daylight when it comes to a non-helicopter rescue.

Everyone passes the time with an anxious undercurrent hanging in the air. I keep repeating "don't panic" to myself as the afternoon continues passing while the passage of time seems to slow to a crawl. A couple comes down

the trail and begins to cross the snowfield. Everyone yells “No, no, no.” They try to communicate that going this way is not safe. Seeing me lying there is all the convincing required. The couple turn right and head over the rocks. As climbers, they still have difficulty negotiating the way, helping each other down. Once over the rocks, they cross over to the duck and disappear after talking with one of my guardians.

We hear another helicopter. It drops down between the canyon walls. How is the pilot managing that in this narrow space? My four companions cheer as the helicopter drops to about fifty feet above and hovers. The swirling drafts from the rotors send everyone’s belongings flying. A ladder drops down and a man climbs down. Who is the victim here is rather obvious. The man waves and the helicopter flies away to land nearby.

All I can manage is, “Thank you, thank you, thank you.” The tall man says his name is Jim. I think he’s a savior. Jim introduces himself to the others and stands over me. “How you doing?”

“A lot better now,” I reply.

Jim kneels beside me and has me recount what happened. His eyes dart to the creek as I speak. He asks a lot of questions regarding my health history including the one that every medical person I meet today repeats: Did I ever lose consciousness?

“No,” I reply.

“What hurts?”

I want to say everything, but reply my entire left side down to my ankle, especially my shoulder, as well as my face. He examines my shoulder and thinks it may be a broken clavicle.

Getting on his walkie-talkie, Jim speaks with a woman in the helicopter. He mentions the woman has over twenty years experience and there is nothing to worry about. They will get me out of here. He needs to assess my condition to see if I’m able to walk. He asks me to stand up. With assistance, I manage to stand next to him. While I had been thinking I may be able to manage to walk to where the helicopter is parked, Jim realizes that is not possible. I can only agree. I can barely manage to walk a couple

of steps on level ground. Is my ankle broken, too? Navigating uneven rocky terrain for over a hundred yards is impossible.

After talking back and forth on the walkie-talkies, they decide to lighten the load in the helicopter by taking my pack and camera down to the ambulance in Twin Lakes, then coming back to get me and Jim. The woman stuffs my Bearikade, cookkit, sleeping bag, and any clothes I'm not wearing back in the pack. One of my rescuers hoists it on his back, disappears down to where the helicopter is parked, and returns with a stretcher-gurney while the helicopter takes off.

While we are waiting for the helicopter to return, Jim looks for my glasses in the creek and assesses my fall. "It's about a seven foot drop you fell." I am feeling relieved to know I am being rescued and willing to do whatever Jim says is necessary. He inspires total confidence. Jim decides the level snow patch to the right by the creek is the best place from which to hoist me to the helicopter and places the gurney there on the snow.

When the helicopter returns and lands nearby, they help me walk to the gurney. Even those few steps are agonizingly difficult. As directed, I try to sit in the sack inside the gurney, but need Jim on my right side and one of my guardians on my left to assist me. The pain is agonizing beyond description. My left arm does not fit inside the narrow confined space. The arm will not move. Jim manages to squeeze it in. I'm inside a sack on the gurney with only a small slit to see out. Jim and my guardians tighten the five belts that hold me in. Jim double-checks the restraints and walkie-talkies the helicopter.

"What will I see" I ask.

"You'll get a great view of the bottom of a helicopter," Jim jokes. He's done this many times in his training he explains.

As the helicopter hovers above me, the lines come down and I am attached. Once again, Jim doublechecks everything. I thank my guardians, wondering if any words can convey my gratitude. I'd asked for their names and addresses to write them thank you's and one stuffs a piece of paper in the open pocket of my jacket as the helicopter begins lifting me up.

A woman sits leaning out on the edge of the helicopter doorway as I am hoisted up. When I am level with the helicopter, she begins securing me. She smiles at me confidently and I smile back. She is fifty feet or more in the air leaning over me while the whirring helicopter draft rushes over her. This is one of those times when one gives complete trust and faith to someone else. There is no point in being afraid even though I'm suspended midair on a gurney with no control over anything. Once I'm secure, the helicopter goes straight up in the narrow canyon. How the pilot is managing all this astounds me.

The helicopter flies a couple of miles and lands in a meadow. I'm unhooked from the helicopter. The woman leans over, smiles, and says they need to go back and get Jim. "We'll be right back." Then they will fly me down to a waiting ambulance at Twin Lakes, she explains. The helicopter flies off.

Is this the meadow at the bottom of Little Slide Canyon the trail passes through? My view is only a three-inch rectangle in the slit of the sack in the gurney. All I can see is sky. Time seems to come to a standstill waiting for the sound of the returning helicopter while staring up at blue sky. I am utterly helpless alone lying on the gurney. Once again, I tell myself that it's one step at a time and trust my rescuers.

The helicopter returns and lands next to me. The pilot, Jim, and the woman decide I can be put inside. Jim takes one end while the woman and pilot take the other. I feel myself being loaded in the tiny space inside the helicopter. The pilot and woman take the two seats and Jim squats next to me. They reassure me the ambulance is waiting in Twin Lakes. We take off straight up, then turn. After a few minutes, we land.

There are several people to help get the stretcher out of the helicopter. They discuss how to get me off the stretcher and on the ambulance gurney. Once again, Jim takes one end and they shift me to the ambulance gurney while I wince and suppress a scream. I have more wiggle room, but I am still flat on my back. They ask me what hospital I want to go to. One is Mammoth Lakes. The other I don't recognize. I have enough presence of mind to say "Mammoth." I figure Barbara and Gordon will know where it is and it probably deals with a lot of other similar injuries due to the ski resort and nearby trails.

After moving me to the ambulance gurney, Jim mentions that I won't be charged for the helicopter rescue. I haven't even be thinking about cost. There are some things beyond cost, but I am grateful for this reassurance. I thank Jim, the woman, and the pilot as well as I can. I try to convey to the pilot how miraculous I consider his flying. There are no words for how much I appreciate their professionalism, kindness, and generosity as well as my four guardian angels who stayed with me in the canyon. Jim says that they are special for stopping and staying with me since that is not always the case.

My gurney is lifted into the ambulance as I thank my rescuers. The ambulance attendant is extremely kind and reassuring, something I definitely need at this point. He says he can give me Fentanyl for my pain once we are on the paved road. I realize we are at the far end of Mono Village beyond the campsites. The ambulance drives slowly over the bumpy dirt road, each bump causing a jolt of pain. When we get to the paved Twin Lakes road, I am greatly relieved. I realize my car is still in the Mono Village parking lot. The logistical problems caused by the accident keep piling up. I must rely on the ingenuity and kindness of others.

Meanwhile, the ambulance attendant is asking the appropriate questions about my current condition, medical history, medications, and any allergies. I answer as best as I can, emphasizing I'm taking Warfarin for atrial fibrillation and drawing a blank on the name of one of the blood pressure medications.

I tell him I want to call my wife as soon as possible. (I find out later that Crystal from Mono County SAR has been keeping Barbara apprised of my situation.) The ambulance attendant gives me a shot of Fentanyl. I don't feel the pain diminish that much, but a sense of relief comes over me as I know I am in the care of people who know what they are doing and will do everything possible. As I lie on the gurney, I have a view to my left out a window. We pass through a town. "Lee Vining?" I ask. No, Bridgeport. My sense of time is completely out of whack. We've only managed to get down the Twin Lakes road, thirteen miles, not the thirty-eight to Lee Vining.

The rest of the ambulance ride passes as if a dream as we roll down highway 395. I recognize Lee Vining from signs glimpsed through the

window and the upstairs gabled room at Tioga Lodge where Barbara and I stayed several years ago. I feel the turn at the Mammoth Lakes exit. Soon we are at the hospital. I am taken off the ambulance gurney, put on a hospital gurney, and wheeled into a room. From the clock on the wall, I notice it's 8:40. I reiterate I want to call my wife. A nurse goes off and comes back with a phone. I tell her the number and she dials. Barbara answers on the first ring. She and our adult son Gordon are driving here tomorrow.

Now, I psychologically give myself up to Dr. Sierra Bourne and nurse Monica Diaz. I go through my medical history one more time: one kidney removed due to cancer, atrial fibrillation, bicuspid aorta, etc. They use scissors to cut the sleeves on my down jacket and polartec so they can remove them and get me in a hospital gown. The nurse connects an IV and takes a blood sample. I notice that my pack and camera are in the corner of the room. Somehow someone has been keeping track of all my stuff. I lose track of time completely.

They wheel me out of the emergency room and down the hall for scans and x-rays. Getting around with an IV stuck in my left arm is an interesting ballet for all the attendants. The man doing the scans is incredibly solicitous, doing the best he can to not cause any more pain than is necessary. He helps me stand for the x-rays of my shoulder and ankle and get on the sliding bed for the scan. When done, he wheels me back to the emergency room.

The x-rays reveal there is no break, only a dislocated shoulder, and my ankle is not broken. Another doctor tells me the scans show he does not need to operate. The major issue was if there was internal bleeding due to the Warfarin, requiring immediate surgery.

Dr. Bourne explains she can reset the shoulder now or they can later put me under anesthesia for a more elaborate procedure. "I've done a few of these," she tells me with confidence. We opt for this simpler, safer procedure.

Before beginning, they give me another shot of Fentanyl since this is going to be extremely painful. I stand up with Dr. Bourne in front of me and nurse Diaz behind me. The doctor carefully moves my arm and shoulder slightly in all directions. Behind me, the nurse rubs and massages my back and shoulder. As the doctor moves my arm and shoulder, I wince

from the pain and suppress a shriek. Dr. Bourne adjusts what she's doing in response. After a few minutes, I hear a "click" on my shoulder. Everyone sighs in relief.

The pain immediately decreases. Instead, I begin to notice the pain on my left leg and face. I tell them I haven't eaten since morning and I'm really hungry. The doctor says I need to wait until tomorrow to make sure there is no need for surgery when I will have another scan to be sure there is no internal bleeding. I am too tired and dazed to fully comprehend this.

Nurse Diaz contemplates how to load all my gear on the gurney to move me to a room in the ICU. Somehow she manages to get everything on. The door swings open and she pushes me and the gurney with all my stuff out, down the hall, through another couple of doors, and into my new quarters in the ICU. I am beyond exhaustion. Before I drift into sleep, I notice the clock on the wall says 1:40. I have nightmares of slowly sliding down uncontrollably on my left side.

I wake up sometime around 7:00. My nurse, Cheryl Heringer, is incredibly kind, understanding, and solicitous. She gently cleans my bloody face and jokes I will look like a raccoon for a few days due to two black eyes. She gets my doctor, "Dr. Fru" Bahiraei who checks me out and tells me I need another scan. Barbara phones to say she and Gordon should arrive sometime between 2:00 and 3:00. When I am asked if I need anything, I mention food, since I have not eaten for 24 hours. Before I can eat, I need the other scan to determine whether there is internal bleeding. The attendant soon arrives and takes me for the scans, then returns me to my room. The scan is negative. Of course, they have long since served breakfast. Cheryl manages to get me some tapioca. It is the best tapioca I will ever taste.

When a man comes to take my order for lunch, I'm at a loss as to what to order. I assumed I didn't have a choice and had to accept whatever they gave me, as when I was in Kaiser Santa Rosa for my kidney removal surgery. Since my teeth are damaged, I require soft food so I get a cheese quesadilla, vegetables, yogurt, and ice cream, which is by far the best portion of lunch.

Barbara and Gordon arrive sometime after 2:00. My spirits lift as much as they are able. I relate to them as well as I can what happened with the accident. When I'm done, Gordon goes off to get a room at the nearby Shiloh Inn.

A physical therapist comes to assess me to see if I'm mobile enough to be discharged tomorrow. I limp down the hall, go up and down the small set of stairs set up for this purpose, limp down to one end of the corridor and back to my room. He says they will evaluate me again in the morning

Late afternoon, the man returns to take my dinner order. Again, I'm at a loss. When dinner comes, it is a single portion of chicken and nothing else. Barbara and Cheryl think I need more food. Cheryl goes and gets ravioli and I devour it. Again, the ice cream is the best part.

Barbara and Gordon go off to have pizza for dinner. Afterwards, Barbara returns and I recount the rest of my trip. I realize it really was a great trip until yesterday at 12:30. With Cheryl watching, I limp down to the bathroom with the IV in tow. Barbara heads off to the motel to finally get some sleep. After the midnight check of my vital signs, I sleep through most of the night. Since I am sleeping, the night nurse doesn't bother to wake me for the 4:00 AM monitoring.

I awake again a little after 7:00. Since it's Saturday, I have a new nurse, Danyll Deslaurier, who is also incredibly kind, professional, and informative when we ask questions. Barbara and Gordon arrive at 7:40. Dr. Fru comes a little after 8:00 and checks how I'm doing. I can go home today if I see my Kaiser doctor within 72 hours. The physical therapist agrees. Barbara and Gordon head off to Twin Lakes with my gear to get my car still sitting in the Mono Village parking lot. Gordon will drive home and Barbara will come back and fetch me. I'm happy to simply be going home.

A couple of hours later, Barbara returns with the car. I change into the clothes Barbara brought from home. After checking out of the hospital, we have lunch. I feel conspicuous in a public place with my black eyes, battered face, and immobilized left arm while limping on my trekking pole.

Barbara drives us home, my first time in over thirty years as a passenger over Tioga Pass. I appreciate being able to look everywhere as we wind our way up to the Yosemite entrance, head past wide-open Dana Meadows, and

descend to Tuolumne Meadows. After we pass by Tenaya Lake full of people and cars enjoying a Saturday afternoon, much of the rest of the drive through Yosemite, down the Priest Grade, through Oakdale into the traffic-filled Bay Area is a blur. When we arrive home, it is difficult to extricate myself from the car. Using my trekking pole, I limp to the front door, and collapse on the waiting bed. Home rarely felt so welcoming and wonderful.

Now, five months later, I am mostly recovered. As I realized on August 8 when I lay in the creek and told myself “don’t panic,” it has been one step at a time, a longer and more difficult process than anticipated. I wonder how people go through it all without a supportive spouse, family, or the resources to pay the bills. The scans of my shoulder revealed a severely torn rotator cuff. Gradually, with physical therapy, I’ve gotten back the use of my left arm. Three teeth were removed and replaced. My agility and stamina slowly improve, day by day.

I simply want to return to sit in silence and solitude somewhere in the transcendence of the High Sierra.

Note: I was not able to remember the names of most of the individuals who rescued me. First, my undying (almost literally) gratitude to the couple from Patagonia and the two climbers who watched over me in Little Slide Canyon. The piece of paper with their names was lost in the confusion of getting in the helicopter, flying to Twin Lakes, and being transferred to the ambulance. I hope somehow they may manage to read this and are able to contact me.

The people at Mono County SAR were nothing short of spectacular. The report I received when discharged from Mammoth Hospital included the names of many of the doctors and nurses so I was able to include them.

There is no way I can possibly repay what I owe each and every one of my rescuers and hospital doctors and nurses. The best I can offer is “thank you!”