



What comes up must go down, and I am looking forward to another refreshing swim.

## Alone

### Mile 1,161

Having left Pinedale, our hitch dropped Rip, Nosh, and me off at the trailhead. Misplace had gone on ahead earlier that morning. Everyone needed some peace and quiet, and I felt the time had come to let the group go. Their pace was a little too fast, the days were a tad too long, and I needed some time alone.

So I said goodbye to my trail family, feeling both sad and relieved. Relieved to slow down and finally let my body heal with the meds. And honestly, I was excited to be heading on totally alone.

I had to look out for myself now. All the decisions in dangerous situations would be on me. All the fun and entertainment, well, I would have to create that for myself now. There was no hiding anymore. For weeks the group had given me a strong sense of security, structure, and joy. I was grateful for my time with them but was equally looking forward to striking out alone.

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My timing to go on alone couldn't have been worse, but as with so many things in life, these things can't be predicted. Soon after I said goodbye to my friends, an enormous thunderbolt ripped through the sky, followed by cracking thunder. Just my luck. But although I was alone

for the first time in a storm, I didn't freak out. I'd been through enough storms with the group.

As it was Sunday, there were lots of day hikers hastily running back to their cars at the trailhead, as most of them hadn't expected the heavy rain. Wet T-shirts clung to their cold bodies as they hurried back. I had bought a new silver sun umbrella a few weeks back and hadn't used it much yet, but this was a great opportunity to use it as protection from the worst of the hail and rain. It took about an hour and a half to blow over, and then I simply pulled my pack back on my shoulders and headed farther up into the Winds.

I followed the trail back to the CDT, and after 10 miles (16 km), I took a right turn and left all the day hikers behind me to finally be alone. It felt good to be walking at my own pace, and I was kind of excited to see what unexpected twists and turns the CDT had in store for me. I definitely had to pay more attention at each trail junction to avoid getting lost, and had to ensure that I had enough water with me until I reached the next spring or river. And although I did take a wrong turn now and then, I generally did okay that first day.

By evening, I was ready to set camp. As I didn't want to be joined by anyone for the night, I walked a good distance from the trail, finding a small lake with a nice flat spot where no one could see me. As it was getting cold, I quickly set up my tent, put all my clothes on to keep warm, and boiled some water for pasta. I was too tired to feel worried or anxious about sleeping in bear territory, as I had already spent nearly 70 nights out in the woods with them. This was my home for now, and I felt comfortable. Grateful that I was finally keeping my food down, I tried to eat as much as possible, aware that I still needed a lot of calories. Although I was pretty tired, I couldn't fall asleep immediately and lay on my back, reflecting on my first day alone and how much I had enjoyed it. On my own, I realized, I only had to listen to my body.

The following days passed in something of a daze. I slowed my pace, took many more breaks, and did far fewer miles than in previous