

rain intensified, I found that not just the outside but also the inside of my tent was getting wetter and wetter. When I later put my headlamp on to go for a pee, I discovered that the bottom half of my inner groundsheet was flooded.

We had set up camp right next to a cliff on a mountain called Windy Peak. We soon found out how the mountain had gotten its name.

Luckily my thick air mattress saved my sleeping bag from getting drenched in the process, but my foot box was soaked. I used my shoes to create an irrigation system to aid the water flow out of my tent. I glanced at the time, disappointed that it was only midnight. Fortunately, I did fall asleep again but woke multiple times to scoop water out of my tent.

When I finally heard the rustle of plastic coming from WoW's direction close by, I knew it was time to get up and get moving. The rain was still pouring down. By this point, the bottom of my sleeping bag was soaked, as was practically everything else around me. An inch-deep puddle stared right back at me when I shone my light on it. As dawn came, I quickly packed everything up and trudged on into the rain in the hope of catching WoW, who had left shortly before me. The only good things about the long climb ahead of me were that it helped warm me up a little and that my cold, wet socks and underwear slowly became lukewarm. The weather predictions had promised us another full day of rain, something we had knowingly walked straight into.

"The miles aren't going to walk themselves," WoW said as I followed his big black backpack up another long climb. As the raindrops continued to fall, my whole being again slipped into survival mode. I put my head down and new umbrella up and trudged up the trail at a painstakingly

slow rate. As the trail stayed relatively high for a while, we followed a long ridge line for many miles. The next water source would only be eight miles (13 km) farther, and as I didn't have any water left, I knelt down and filled up my dirty bottle with water flowing down the trail itself; my filter would clean it for me. Water is water, and I was grateful for it, whatever color it came in. At around 15:00 in the afternoon, I suddenly saw a tiny patch of blue sky ahead of us, and my heart sang. "Could it be? No, really?" I sighed.

We were in luck! We had a short window where the sun shone down on us, and within minutes we had stopped and unpacked everything into what is called a *garage sale*. Everything I owned was wet, and I couldn't believe my luck as a gentle breeze and some sunshine slowly dried our belongings. I stripped down to my underwear to dry my clothes and hurried around, flipping each item like a pancake to dry. Although not everything had dried fully by the time the next misty cloud rolled over, it still felt so good to have semidry clothes on again as I headed down the trail with a very satisfied smile. Another side effect of this weather was that we had the entire trail to ourselves, having left some 30 hikers back in Salida. A situation that suited me just fine.

Some days later, WoW mentioned that he had seen a brown rabbit with fluffy white feet. He told me that the mountain rabbits slowly transformed from brown into white as they prepared for winter.

"They what?" I said in astonishment.

He explained how color changes are an evolutionary survival mechanism born of a rabbit's status as a prey animal. Rabbits molt several times a year. Their fur initially molts and then grows back a different shade, camouflaging them to fit the season, and protecting them from potential predators.

Paradoxically, arctic foxes do the same, only they are the animals of prey.

I couldn't believe my ears: how smart, how adaptive these creatures had become through hundreds of thousands of years of evolution.



White fluffy chameleons high in the mountains, camouflaging themselves from their prey.

One could argue that I, too, was adapting well to the upcoming winter around me; my hair was turning white. But these foxes and rabbits would return to full color in the spring. My hair would still be white.

But I have always considered myself somewhat of a chameleon, adapting to different social groups. There's something that I like about the fluidity of different groups, different attitudes, different rituals, different codes, different expectations, and different roles, while at the same time staying true to myself with all my qualities and flaws.

The trail passed through endless berry fields. But strangely, I hadn't seen any blueberries or huckleberries along the trail these past three months. The bears had gotten there before us. But in southern Colorado, we were treated with wild raspberries. The red, juicy wild raspberries were ripe for picking along the trail, and we were loving it. As I bent down to pick, my hands slowly turned pink, as did my lips and mouth. My body desperately needed vitamins and fiber, and I could feel my cells rejoicing with every berry I swallowed. WoW soon joined the pick-your-own party, and without saying a word, we feasted as we made slow progress down the trail.

"Good morning, young man," WoW said as he walked into a freezing sunrise.

"Good morning, young man," I replied. It was becoming somewhat of a ritual each morning. On that day, we rose early to walk the 11 miles (18 km) downhill into Creede, Colorado. Once in town, I suffered another restless night; I couldn't sleep well above 10,000 feet (3,048 m). I tossed and turned all night, tried to watch a movie, did some writing, and edited some photos, but nothing really seemed to help me sleep.

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When morning finally broke, I was happy to return to the trail. Things were good, and my spirits were high, but I still could have used some rest. There was a general fatigue hanging over me, and although my legs were strong and my body was healthy, I couldn't eat enough calories compared to what I burned during the day. My body was slowly eating away at itself, and the