

Cosby finishes Oregon Coast Trail, dreams bigger

September 25, 2021



Traversing the 402-mile Oregon Coast Trail, dubbed OCT by seasoned hikers, involves disconnected and sometimes unsafe routes that require the navigation of tidal flows in order to proceed. Add to that a diagnosis of cystic fibrosis - a condition that mimics breathing through a straw - and 25-year-old Colton Cosby's ambition might best be described as not a challenge, but rather a struggle.

Not that Cosby, or "CJ" as short for Colton James Cosby, saw it that way. He completed the trail solo on September 20, carrying a portable nebulizer in his 30-pound backpack in case he needed supplemental mist to open his airways. Ironically, when asked what was most challenging about the expedition, Cosby's response was downright common - "My feet hurt," he said.

The entire venture took 29 days to complete, or as Cosby described it: four miles per hour; 26 nights of pitching a tent; one night in a hiker hut; one night in a Motel 6 (to shower and wash some clothes), and some unfortunate road walking along the 101 where 10% of the trail isn't rooted in nature.

“That’s when my feet would hurt,” said Cosby, who at a stature of 210 pounds talked about the trek with a boyish nature. “But I needed to do this first. I plan to do the Ice Age Trail in May or June of next year, and that’s 1,200 miles over the entire state of Wisconsin.”

A quick Google search pegs the Oregon Coast Trail at 362 miles. But that doesn’t account for the road walking that Cosby said he had to trudge between established walking paths and camp sites - hence the extra and arduous 40 miles that Cosby said he wished the Oregon state park system would invest funds towards, in the interest of not only his feet, but the safety of those who tackle the trail.

Cosby, who lives in Douglas County and finished his trek at the Oregon/California border in Curry County, is used to obstacles, however, and isn’t easily deterred. Near the age of 5, Cosby had not yet begun to speak. His adoptive parents learned sign language to connect with the active toddler, and his dad said he’s been adapting to his son’s unique obstacles and ambitions ever since.

“CJ can be hard to keep up with,” said David Cosby, who works in the logging industry as a security and fire watcher in the field for Dancer Logging, Inc. “Even more so when trying to keep up with his mind, because he has so many hopes and ambitions of things he wants to do with his life.”

The junior Cosby said his ultimate goal is to cross the Pacific Crest Trail, a behemoth 2,650-mile jaunt that begins at the small town of Campo at the Mexican border and reaches north to Manning Park in British Columbia. Cosby hopes to master this and other trails while pursuing a degree in documentary filming between excursions. This could also mean a lot of travel time for Cosby’s dad, who walks with him during day trips on local trails but opts to travel from a distance in his 32-foot travel trailer during the longer hauls.

It’s obvious the duo is close. Cosby finished the Oregon Coast Trail on September 19, but decided to spend the night at Crissey State Park so that he and his dad could walk the last mile together, ceremoniously touching the state park sign with the palm of their hands.

While Cosby noted he has the support of his dad, he is also inspired by another: Nick Talbot, a County Durham, England-based climber who also has cystic fibrosis. Talbot was the first man with cystic fibrosis to summit weather-fickle Mt. Everest - on his third attempt. On his second attempt, he suffered cracked ribs and hypothermia after an 8.7 magnitude earthquake caused an avalanche that killed many climbers, including his friend and Google Executive Dan Fredinburg.

The climbing community, though vast, is nonetheless close knit. Talbot responded to a request for comment from the *Curry Coastal Pilot* about Cosby’s achievement.

“First of all, a big congratulations to Colton,” Talbot said. “402 miles is impressive for anyone to do, let alone someone with CF (cystic fibrosis). He must have overcome so much to achieve this. I’m happy that my Everest challenge has encouraged Colton to push impressive new boundaries, and I hope all CFers get to live their best life and push their own personal boundaries whatever they may be.”

“That has made my day,” responded Cosby, who was eating his first post-hike, home-cooked breakfast when notified of Talbot’s words.

Talbot echoed Cosby's drive to keep pushing forward.

"I was inspired to climb by the desire to push boundaries and raise profile and money for CF charities around the world," he said. "It's really tough having challenging goals with CF because it is so much harder to become as fit as other people, deal with lower lung capacity and potential infections and continue treatments. Sometimes, you have to develop special techniques to deal with CF to achieve your goal."

As for his next excursion? Cosby conceded he will need to give up his penchant for junk food, opting instead for a high-protein and nutrient rich diet.

"This time I was able to complete the trip with a basic outline that was loosely planned," he said. "But the next time I will need to eat healthier in order to meet the 10-20 miles of walking a day."

The senior Cosby, perhaps still recuperating from the month prior, was more inclined to reflect on the day's one-mile walk to the finish line.

"It was a very emotional time. He's got a disease," David Cosby said. "He's gonna die with it sooner or later, we just don't know when. Until then, he wants to get as much out of life as possible."