

GARBAGE MEN

The Packing It Out crew hauled thousands of pounds of trash off the AT and PCT over the last two years. If we all followed their lead, perhaps there'd be nothing left to pick up. By Carolyn Webber

➔ You've probably spied a bit of garbage on the trail. Maybe a stray Snickers wrapper or frayed cord or scrap of foil. Perhaps the sight prompted you to pick up the detritus and carry it out with your own trash. Good for you. But what if you came across something far bigger—say, a discarded mattress? No one would fault you for thinking, *I wish I could do something, but there's no way.*

Seth "Cap" Orme, Paul "Spice" Twedt, and Joe "Goose" Dehnert confronted just such a dilemma last year when they found a queen-size mattress on the AT. But instead of looking the other way, they picked it up and took turns hauling it to a dump station. They had to make a stretcher with two poles to move the 70-pound mattress. The effort—along with time-consuming tasks like picking up shards of glass—added days to their thru-hike. But they didn't care. They'd come to the AT on a mission to clean up the entire trail.

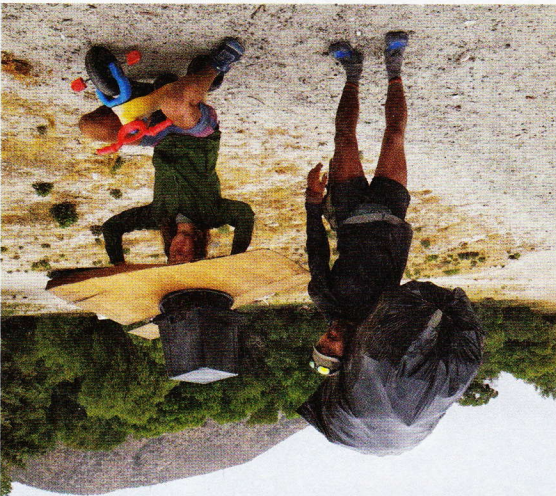
Orme, 26, conceived the idea on a dayhike near the Appalachian Trail while visiting family. He picked up about a pound for every mile that day, and the experience made him wonder: What about a massive cleanup of the AT?

Back home in Minnesota, Orme recruited friends Twedt and Dehnert to do just that, and they dubbed their campaign Packing It Out. On their 2015 thru-hike, the crew cleared more than 1,000 pounds of trash off the AT, shoving food wrappers, old clothes, and even broken TV sets into their packs. "You name it, we found it," Orme said afterward.

The project was hard, but seeing mounds of trash filling a bin instead of piling up on the trail prompted Orme and Twedt to bring their trash grabbers to the PCT in 2016. They started their thru-hike on the

Best Trail Postcards

Most thru-hikers use blogs and Facebook posts to stay in touch with home. Lindsey "Milyagi" Fox, 25, packed watercolors on her 2016 PCT thru-hike and mailed paintings to friends and family. Right: mile 1,100 in California's Desolation Wilderness.



top: Orme (left) and volunteer Chris "Samples" Moore at mile 444; Orme, Twedt (center), and Kerl "Turkey" George carried this load 15 miles; in Washington, Twedt holds up the trip's biggest birthday balloon.



Mexican border and immediately encountered a desert landscape littered with windblown birthday balloons. They each collected 40 pounds of trash in the first few days. Once they got deeper into mountain wilderness, though, the amount of trail-side garbage decreased, to less than a pound of trash per day.

"Now, we're not finding much trash and we're thinking, 'Is that a bad thing?'" Orme said when we caught up with the pair near the end of their PCT thru-hike. The duo was gratified to find hikers were sending emails and texts through their website (packingitout.blogspot.com), showing off the trash they picked up themselves along the way. "At the end of the day, we want there to be no need for us," Orme says. "Everyone should want to keep our outdoor places clean."

