



# MarkHitsTheRoad

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## Hiking Road Trip (H25A)

I had always done a lot of hiking, probably a lot more than most people realized. These included day hikes in the Great Smoky Mountains that ranged from 20 to 28 miles, and longer road trips where my total hiking for the trip approached 100 miles. It slowed down as I got older and developed diabetic neuropathy in my feet, when I put a 15-mile daily limit on my hikes, often achieved through multiple shorter hikes in case something happened while out on some trail.

It came to an end in 2020 when I broke a bone in my left foot at the end of a Utah road trip. The trip started with a 10-mile hike, and after finishing all of my planned hikes, I was scouting a remote trailhead for future reference when it happened. I cracked the navicular in my left ankle. Although it healed in a reasonable amount of time, I broke the same bone completely in half a couple months later, and a bone fragment broke off in the same area of my right foot. I was diagnosed with Charcot foot, a rare diabetes complication resulting from long-term neuropathy that leads to a softening of the bones in the feet so that they easily break. I was fitted with custom prescription CROW (Charcot Restraint Orthotic Walker) boots, designed to cradle my calves and distribute weight to the ground bypassing my ankles.

But something unusual happened. The two halves of my navicular attached themselves to nearby bones and solidified in these “wrong” positions, and my bone density improved a lot (probably helped by my vitamin regimen). The wrong “wrong” positions could be painful, but I lucked out. Not as stable as it would have been if they healed properly, but more stable than just floating around. The fragment in the right foot is still floating around, but not in a painful way. And the boots do their job.

I began hiking again a couple years later, with cautious short hikes – and with the blessing of my podiatrist. Over time I became a bit more ambitious, although always aware that my luck could run out at any time – Charcot foot is a progressive condition, after all. Still, I haven’t broken any more bones in more than four years now, even as I hit about 60 miles of trail hiking in each of the last two years.

When I got home from my last trip, I realized that I was closing in on 100 miles of trail hiking in 2025. So, I identified a handful of hikes I could take on a loop drive from Las Vegas to Phoenix to Yuma to Palm Springs that would get me over 100 miles of trail hiking for the year.

Of course, 100 miles doesn’t seem like a lot to me given my past hiking history. But I haven’t come across anyone else hiking while wearing two CROW boots and using two canes, either.

I drove down to Phoenix knowing that I wouldn't have much time for hiking on the first day of this trip. I'd lose an hour crossing into Arizona, and the end of daylight savings time meant losing daylight pretty early this time of year. Both hikes were in the Prescott area.



I first visited Watson Lake Reservoir in early 2024, but the mostly overcast skies during that visit didn't bring out the color of the Granite Dells. I had more sunshine this visit as I hiked a section of the Watson Lake Loop trail.



The Visita View Loop trail in a suburban Prescott park led to a hilltop collection of rock featuring more than 6000 petroglyphs. And no, I didn't photograph all of them.

The next day, I drove to Yuma, but I lost an hour due to an obnoxious interstate construction merge that led to a lengthy detour. At Kofa National Wildlife Refuge, I hiked around the Crystal Hill area, more for the scenery in my case, but rockhounds can look for and collect quartz crystals here.



Crystal Hill



The highlight of the day was repeating my 2017 hike of the Painted Desert Trail at Imperial National Wildlife Refuge along the Colorado River north of Yuma. The colors are the result of volcanic activity 30,000 years ago.



Hiking along the Painted Desert Trail



I also checked out the views from four overlooks at the refuge. From Smoke Tree Point, I saw the Colorado River, which is lined with narrow bands of wetlands. This is part of the Pacific Flyway, a major bird migration route. With hundreds of migratory species using this area, birdwatching is popular here, especially in the spring.



My hike the next morning in Yuma's East Wetlands Park followed part of the Yuma Canal, one of the canals that diverts Colorado River water to farming areas in the region.



On my drive to Palm Springs, I returned to Tumco Historical Townsite, a ghost town and gold mining site. Stone foundations and a few standing walls are among the town remnants visible along the loop trail through the townsite, which went through several periods of boom and bust. Native Americans first told Spanish colonists about the gold here about 300 years ago.



Large cyanide vats remain at Tumco. A cyanide solution was used to leach gold from crushed ore during one of the mine's revivals.



But cyanide contaminated the groundwater. Arsenic, mercury and cyanide also got mixed in with the dust that workers breathed. As a result, workers at these mines were more likely to end up here – the Tumco cemetery – than show up at the bank to make a deposit. Rocks were piled on top of desert graves in those days to discourage carrion-eating wildlife from digging up fresh graves.



I got to the Palm Springs area early enough that I was able to get a hike in along the Canyon View Loop trail at Whitewater Preserve, now part of Sand to Snow National Monument.



The next morning, I headed over to Indian Canyon on the Agua Caliente Indian Reservation to hike its Palm Canyon trail through a large grove of palm trees. Unfortunately, I found that it was closed for the week. On the way there, I had passed the Oswit Canyon Trailhead, so I stopped there for a hike. As it is entirely at the base of a mountain and next to a luxury residential area and golf course, it was the least scenic of the trails I hiked.



The Mission Creek Preserve, also now part of Sand to Snow National Monument, was the site of my last hike of the trip, an out-and-back hike that followed Mission Creek.



By the time I reached this wetlands area on the hike out, I had reached my 100 miles goal. But I was enjoying the hike in spite of temperatures in the 90s and lack of shade, so I continued on for a while before turning around and hiking back. As a result, I hit 100 miles for the year with room to spare.



This view of the San Bernardino Mountains was as far as I got at Mission Creek when I decided to turn around, but it was the longest hike of the trip.

The foot situation has slowed my hiking pace a lot, and the CROW boots are like hiking with a ten-pound weight on each foot, so a four-mile hiking day is a good day now (I have exceeded six miles in a day only twice since becoming booted). And short hikes are a precaution in case something were to go wrong. But I'm making the most of an annoying situation.

Charcot foot qualifies me for a handicapped parking placard for my car, so I'm often asked why I don't have one. But when you look at these pictures, does it look like I need help getting across a parking lot? Certainly not.