

CONTRIBUTED PHOTOGRAPH

Smith stands at the top of Mt. Whitney in California, at an elevation of 14,508.



Justin

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“Some people it doesn’t matter if they continue every step, everyone’s got a different belief on what a thru-hike is or what they want to accomplish out there,” Smith said. “To me, it really bothered me, I really wanted to say I hiked from Mexico to Canada, and I felt if I had missed any part of the trail, I couldn’t say that.”

The only time Smith hitched was to get to a town to restock on supplies. He said he took more Zero Days (few or no miles hiked on trail) this summer than he had on past thru-hikes.

“I liked a lot of the hole-in-the-wall towns that were just maybe a market and a little store or just a post office and a market,” Smith said. “A lot of the little towns had good little bakeries.”

He said he would occasionally stay in a hostel but preferred to camp out along the trail.

“There weren’t as many towns that the trail actually went through,” Smith said. “Most of them you had to hitch to or walk a mile or two to.”

Smith said some days were tough mentally, but he appreciated the support from his family and those who follow his adventures on his Facebook page, “Justin’s Footsteps.”

“I felt like with the other hikes (behind him) that it wouldn’t be that bad, but sometimes it seems the more I do the harder it gets,” he explained of those mentally down days.

The rewarding views

Even with the challenges of long-distance hiking, Smith said he really enjoyed so much of the scenery, including the sunrises and sunsets. One of his favorite areas was the Sierra Nevada Mountains in California.

“King’s Canyon in the Sierra Mountains was a hard one to beat, you have surrounding peaks and crystal blue lakes everywhere,” he said. “But also, the Washington Mountains were hard to beat. Some areas seemed a little more lush and green with snow patches in those mountains compared to Sierras.”

Smith said although he liked the woods of Oregon and Washington, he sometimes felt like he was in a “green tunnel” in the thick woods and not getting the picturesque views. One day of hiking he could see Mt. Rainer in the distance all day.

“It was a little more rewarding coming over a pass or climbing all day and you see views far in the mountains,” he said.

‘Head full of memories’

“I have officially walked over 2,650 miles from Mexico to Canada!” Smith posted to his Facebook page on Aug. 14. “Tears of joy as I took my last



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Smith, pictured left, began the Pacific Crest Trail at the Mexican border on May 6 and completed the trail at the Canadian border, right, on Aug. 12.

steps of this journey, head full of all the beautiful memories, from the wonderful, amazing people I met and people who have helped me along the way, to all of you who encouraged me with your kind words, to all the beauty in God’s country that I have seen, and to the lows that made me a stronger person and stronger hiker. ... Thank you everyone again for making me push to the end, I love you all!!”

Smith said reaching the end of his hike was an emotional experience, that the experience now feels like a dream.

“I walked to the end, the flags were blowing nice

and there was no one there,” he said. “It was really quiet, so I sat there for a while and enjoyed it.”

Next up for Smith is possibly the Continental Divide Trail, a 3,100-mile trail running the border between Mexico and New Mexico to the Canadian border with Montana, also through Idaho, Colorado and Wyoming. Already with the Appalachian Trail and the PCT complete, the CDT would be the last of the longest National Scenic Trails Smith would need to hike to earn the title of being a “Triple Crowner.”

To follow Smith’s hiking adventures, visit his Facebook page, “Justin’s Footsteps.”