

# ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

## 2 boys, 270 miles: O.C. scouts make memories during mega-hike

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At 13,000 feet, Mount Whitney's 99 switchbacks snake up a wall of lung-sucking brutality and stop many from standing atop the highest mountain in the contiguous United States.

For Boy Scouts Ryan Vosbigian and John-Aaron Bozanic, the switchbacks' test of strength and suffering was no different last month. The two teenagers trudged their way to the summit battling fatigue and high-altitude nausea.

Yet Vosbigian and Bozanic hiked with four variables that made them vastly different from the hundreds of hikers who take on Whitney every

year.

The first big variable was that although most mortals hike Whitney with light day packs, the teenagers humped backpacks weighing 50 pounds.

The second big variable was that their Mount Whitney climb was only the beginning of a quest that took nearly four weeks and covered more than the entire length of the John Muir Trail.

In total, Vosbigian, a high school senior, and Bozanic, a high school sophomore, accompanied by three adults, hiked more than 260 miles.

Oh, yes, the last two variables for these Boy Scouts?

Commitment and perseverance.

### TEENS LEAD

If you are like the 15-year-old Bozanic, who attends La Quinta High in Westminster, or the 17-year-old Vosbigian, a student at Crean Lutheran in Irvine, then you are methodical, giving and love a challenge.

Vosbigian's and Bozanic's shirts drip with Boy Scout medals. Vosbigian has 41 merit badges; Bozanic has 58.

Both belong to scouting's Order of the Arrow, the organization's National Honor Society. Its ideals include leadership, environmental stewardship and service – that's "cheerful service," thank you.

To prepare for tackling the famous John Muir Trail, the boys raised their game, taking on long and longer hikes. Each completed several 50-milers.

Did I mention they manage darn good grades?

They also manage something more, something we all might think about in this age of helicopter parenting when some drop everything to save a teenager who forgets, say, a soccer uniform.

Both scouts planned, bought and prepared the meals for the nearly four-week hike. That included mailing supplies to drop points where the trail touches civilization, persuading friends to carry supplies into the wilderness.

As I write this column, I munch on a granola bar the young Bozanic made in July. That's right, July.

"My friends said it was so good," Bozanic said, handing me the concoction that made its way up the trail, "I should market it."

A mix of oats, dried fruit, nuts and marshmallow – and I hate marshmallow – I take a bite. Then another bite, and another.

The bar disappears. Yum!

Bozanic's dad, Jeff, is a master diver and an expert outdoorsman. Along with the preparation, he left the cooking to his son. "I tell him, 'If you mess up, then we don't eat.'"

Jeff Bozanic, who will leave for Antarctica in a few weeks to test (very) cold water diving gear, explains he went on the long hike because "it's important to me to pass on my love of the outdoors.

"It's important to teach a sense of self-responsibility."

His points ring especially true considering the rugged trail requires navigating steep and rocky terrain in rain and snow.

## STARRY NIGHTS

Ask the boys the highlight of the expedition and they answer like any other teenager: real food.

In Kings Canyon at 10,444 feet, the boys met their human mules and gathered for dinner on the shores of Charlotte Lake, a cerulean patch of blue water surrounded by granite boulders and rugged pines.

After more than a week of freeze-dried food, dried meat and noodles, it was their first real food.

The menu: tri-tip and apple pie.

The meal was more than welcome. Vosbigian built his food supply off a spreadsheet that provided 2,600 calories a day.

But in the field, the teenager discovered he needed at least 3,000 calories a day.

John-Aaron Bozanic's marshmallow bars served as the food cavalry.

The first week, the team of five stayed together. But they soon discovered hiking at one's own pace is easiest. The men, Jeff Bozanic, David Keck and Jim Larson, followed the scouts, keeping in contact through radios.

By the time the group was at the halfway point, bodies were used to the demands of hiking an average of 11 miles a day with packs ranging from 45 to 60 pounds.

The trail ended in Yosemite, the same weekend that the National Parks Service celebrated its centennial with free passes. Crowds were everywhere. But so what?

John-Aaron Bozanic and his dad climbed the backside of Half Dome.

On the trail, Vosbigian immersed himself in contemplating his future, what paths he might take as he heads toward college. John-Aaron Bozanic found the rhythm of hiking offered a certain peace.

Still, for both boys, the real magic was witnessing the night sky in all its brilliance, the glowing stream of light that is the Milky Way, the infinity of the universe.

Vosbigian summed up the trail's inspiration by paraphrasing something he heard during the journey:

"Once you're done with the trail," the scout offered, "a part of you will always be there."

In a few days, the two scouts will be awarded the coveted John Muir Award. The last time any scout in this area earned one was six years ago.

Tonight, Vosbigian will face his inquisitors to determine if he will make Eagle Scout. You can bet the scout will go the distance.

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