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100-mile Trek for Troops: Three Campo alums along with eight fraternity brothers hike to help veterans

By Jennifer Wake



From left, at the top of mount Whitney, Zach Dashner, Jeremy Hauser and Nick Talken. Photo provided

Three Campolindo grads, Nick Talken, Jeremy Hauser, and Zach Dashner, along with eight of their Sigma Nu fraternity brothers from UC Davis are setting out tomorrow morning on a 100-mile hike with one goal in mind: to raise awareness of the struggling veteran community coming home from Iraq and Afghanistan.

"Our friends and families are spiritually and financially invested in our trek and we hope that this investment will translate into similar involvement and support for veterans across the United States," said Hauser, who graduated from Campolindo in 2009. "This is a journey of personal growth, but it is also one of camaraderie and brotherhood."

Beginning September 13, the 11 young men will don backpacks and set out from the Bishop Pass Trail Head at the John Muir Trail and hike for 10 days through wooded terrain until they reach the 14,505-foot peak of Mount Whitney.

To prepare, every backpacker affiliated with the trip was required to sign a contract. "Part of this

contract states that each participant must go on weekly hikes with weighted backpacks, not only to get into shape, but also to break in boots and avoid crippling foot injuries during the trek," said Hauser. "The hike is actually now just over 100 miles and it is the first trip of this magnitude for any of us, although many of us do have plenty of backpacking experience."

Dashner, who got the idea for the Trek from his brother's experience on a similar trip, is leading the hike. He was a Troop 204 Eagle Scout and has been on four "50-milers," which are backpacking trips the troop goes on every August. "I also was inspired by my father who served in the United States Marine Corp in the early '60s and was a local law enforcement agent in Contra Costa County," he said.

Hauser was involved with Troop 246 in Moraga and has similar backpacking experience.

"I feel like the most challenging thing that we will encounter on this trip will be the first few days of adjusting to long days of hiking and elevation change," said Dashner. "If the group dynamics work well then positive attitudes and adjusting to the challenges later on in the hike shouldn't be a problem."

Hauser agrees, adding, "For college students, one of the hardest things to do is live off of the grid. Without our usual comforts, whether it be iPhones, laptops, or queen mattresses, we will undoubtedly be challenged. I am both excited and anxious for 10 days of simpler living. It could prove to be our biggest obstacle or strongest encouragement."

Dashner hopes they can look back on this experience and say that it had a life-changing impact on them, "not only in completing such a monumental task but also in changing how we individually look at the world and help others throughout our lives."

As of last week, donations came from 47 families from seven states in the U.S. including donations from 14 Lamorinda residents and families, helping the group raise \$4,115 for Pathway Home, a veterans recovery program.

"Our goal is to raise awareness for [post-traumatic stress disorder] PTSD and help increase funding to recovery programs," Dashner said. "One of the biggest issues with fighting PTSD is an unwillingness to accept vulnerability and get help. We hope that we can help combat this fear and use this trip to show veterans that there are people willing to fight for them."

You can follow the Trek on Twitter (@TrekkingfortheT) and on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/>

UCDSigmaNu. For information on Pathway Home, visit www.thepathwayhome.org.

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[back](#)

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