

# Backcountry

## The Gear Closet »

### Meet WTA's New Gear Team



There's a heap of outdoor gear out there. Some of it good, some of it great. Our mission is to bring only the best to your attention: the most fully featured items, the best values, the cleverest innovations and the most stylish designs.

Likewise, there are lots of people who like getting outside and lots of people who like buying gear. People who build their lives around outdoor recreation *and* take the time to find the outdoor gear that best meets their needs are harder to come by. But, as we introduce this new gear team, we're confident that we've found five people who are both a shade more aggressive in their approach to the outdoors and a shade more obsessive about the features of the gear they wear and carry. See what you think.

#### Cheri Higman

Some women maintain a menagerie of purses. In Cheri's case, it's packs. She has her go-to pack, which is a 45-liter from Black Diamond, and then a 65-liter pack for longer trips (or short trips with lots of gear), a 30-liter for day hikes or ski trips, and, of course, an 18-liter summit bag that doubles as a stuff sack. Et cetera. And inside those packs? A sweet collection of the lightest, most useful gear there is. A true

gear hound, she will hunt down deals for the gear she needs, and pick up gear she may need someday if she spots a deal that's too good to pass up.

As a kid, Cheri hiked all the trails off the Mountain Loop Highway; these days, she's partial to the northeast Cascades where she can crag climb, hike and mountaineer—all in

**WTA's new gear team members, from left to right: Cheri Higman, Eli Boschetto, Cherie Bevers, Patrick Leahy and Matt Thyer.**

**Washington Trails Association would like to thank Allison Woods for her years of volunteering as *Washington Trails* gear editor.**

**Catch up with her online at [www.allisonsadventures.wordpress.com](http://www.allisonsadventures.wordpress.com).**

the same weekend. An economist by day, Cheri is looking forward to putting her creative side to work while writing gear reviews. She's a Washington Alpine Club climbing class instructor and has earned her "green hat" volunteering on the trail with WTA.

### Eli Boschetto

Readers who recognize Eli's name from several recent features in *Washington Trails* (including the piece on the John Day Fossil Beds in this issue) will know that he's an avid backpacker with a keen need to explore new places. What you may not know is that Eli also follows outdoor industry news, knows where to find great gear deals and even posts reviews on his personal blog.

Among his many trips, Eli took a thirty-day, 224-mile hike on the John Muir Trail earlier this summer. He'll be out snowshoeing all winter long.

### Cherie Bevers

Cherie hikes every day, cruising up a nearby logging road for her exercise routine, and regularly heads out on longer hiking trips with friends and family in tow. So committed is she to sharing her love of the outdoors—and the right gear for getting out—that Cherie has even purchased hiking shoes for two friends who didn't know what a difference the right footwear could make.

"The emphasis in stores that supply outdoor gear is on the young and fit," says Cherie, who describes herself as proof that overweight people are active, too. She'd like to change the perception that these folks aren't out exploring our beautiful state and also encourage manufacturers to design more gear for those outside the lean-and-mean frame.

Cherie hikes, backpacks and is looking forward to snowshoe lessons this winter. With a background in materials engineering, her eye is trained to look for those crucial differences in gear design and construction.

### Patrick Leahy

Ask a normal hiker about his insulated jacket, and he might respond with "It's warm. It's comfy. I like it." Ask Patrick about his favorite jacket and you get more specifics. He likes that he can "quickly cinch both the neck and hem with one-handed drawcords and also lock down the wrists with Velcro tabs" and that

"both front pockets are fleece-lined for added warmth and comfort." Still listening? You'll find out that he's a fan of the PrimaloftECO insulation in his Mountain Hardwear jacket because it is as warm as down, warmer than other similar synthetics, and still insulates while wet—something you need to think about in the often damp Pacific Northwest.

A backpacker since his preteen years, Patrick has coursed trails all across the country. Washington must have called to him more than most places, though, as it lured him out of the Midwest about six years ago. In addition to backpacking, he's a cyclist, trailrunner, mountain biker, climbing class instructor and snowshoer.

### Matt Thyer

So, what kind of outdoorsy guy is Matt? The kind who will run up to the Pacific Crest at four in the morning, just to see the sun rise. Without thinking that's weird or special or anything. (See a sample trip report on p.41)

On the application for this gear review team, we listed nine muscle-powered outdoor activities that one might participate in. Matt checked each and every box. It must be those hours before sunrise that allow him to hike, scramble, mountaineer and run in the summer, snowshoe and cross-country ski in the winter. Matt's penchant for quality gear comes from six seasons of working as a backcountry wilderness guard in Colorado in the 1980s, and he's been perfecting his gear list ever since.

Matt's also keen to give back to trails. As a Hike-a-Thon participant, he racked up more than 160 miles in August 2009 and raised more than \$2,000 for WTA along the way. He participated again in 2010, and you can check his final count by visiting WTA's Hike-a-Thon Hall of Fame online at [www.wta.org/support/hike-a-thon/hike-a-thon-1](http://www.wta.org/support/hike-a-thon/hike-a-thon-1).

From a mountaineer who thinks "car-to-car" is the best way to summit Washington's highest peaks, to a trail runner who often wakes up in the wilderness and runs downhill before heading to work, the folks on this team will be pushing the gear they test to its limits. If they're happy with the gear they carry out on epic runs, daily hikes and rigorous climbs, chances are good that you'll be happy with that gear too. ♦

**There's no question that quality gear can help keep you safe and happy in the great outdoors, as Patrick Leahy demonstrates here on the summit of Mount Baker.**

