

He rocked the world of climbing, challenged the accepted wisdom in sea kayaking, and has turned his renegade way of thinking to backpacking. Of course, Ray Jardine says we've been doing it all wrong.

BY PETER POTTERFIELD

h e RAY WAY

tHE SOFT-SPOKEN 50-YEAR-OLD SITTING in the pale sunshine outside his Pacific Northwest home seems an unlikely troublemaker. Feeding peanuts to a brazen blue-jay that hops and bobs for attention, Ray Jardine smiles wryly through a close-cropped salt-and-pepper beard. "They just didn't get what I was trying to do," he says finally, with a tone of frustration. "It was as if they were somehow...threatened."

It hardly matters whether Jardine is talking about the heated reaction to his original ideas about long-distance backpacking or to his innovative camming devices—called "friends"—that ushered in a new era of rock climbing. The man has a way of standing the status quo on its ear and enraging a lot of hidebound thinkers in the process. It's not that he *means* to do it. Jardine is just careful, methodical, thorough, and unbound by conventional thinking. When he applies himself to a problem, the solutions that result fly in the face of accepted practice.

When Jardine first published *The Pacific Crest Trail Hiker's Handbook* in 1992 and then came out with a substantially revised version in 1995, he challenged some long-held

beliefs about the proper way to backpack. The book, a how-to manual for any long-distance hike and not just a guide to the Pacific Crest Trail, outlines a system of novel techniques for hiking as far as 30 miles a day or farther, day after day, with no more effort than most of us expend covering half that distance. "The Ray Way" amounts to an almost total repudiation of what Jardine terms "standard backpacking style." It was as if he were saying to backcountry travelers, "Excuse me, but just about everything you've been doing up 'til now is *wrong*."

In typical Jardine fashion, The Ray Way was developed through intense personal experience, starting with his first long-distance hike, a PCT trek, in 1989. "That first day...it was like we were going to the moon." The outcome, he says, was always "in question." Even so, he and his wife Jenny arrived at the Canadian border 4½ months later. It had been a rewarding journey, but a physically rigorous one.

He went on to do the other two legs of the Triple Crown of American trails—the Appalachian and Continental Divide—and along the way watched far too many hikers suffer, often becoming exhausted, discouraged, and eventually quitting. There had to be a way to make long hikes more than grim ordeals.

In 1994 Ray and Jenny hiked the PCT a third time, covering the 2,700 miles in only three months and four days—almost 45 days quicker than the first time. They didn't walk any faster, they just spent more hours each day on the trail. "That hike was pure joy," says Jardine. "With the focus no longer on whether or not we could finish, we could enjoy how much fun it was to spend months in the wilderness." Never had he felt so in tune with the wild.

And thus was born The Ray Way, a blend of philosophy and innovative techniques culled from the hard lessons learned while hiking more than 12,000 total miles. At the



"Way" the options: Jardine holds a typical 28-ounce backpacking boot and a 10-ounce running shoe, which he favors for getting weight off his feet and slashing daily energy expenditure.

One of his role models is Emma Gatewood, who hiked the Appalachian Trail three times, the last at age 70. She wore Keds, used a shower curtain for a shelter, and carried her gear in a sack slung over her shoulder. "Most people are pantywaists," she told Jardine.

heart of the system lies an unstinting reduction in packweight. In Jardine's eyes, packweight is the total weight of the pack, minus food and water. On his first PCT hike, Jardine's pack weighed about 25 pounds. On his third hike, it was less than 9 pounds.

To get such a light load Jardine makes his own gear (he calls it the gateway to the "inner sanctum"), which few of us would bother to do. Even so, his results are hard to argue with. His homemade pack weighs 13 ounces and cost him \$10.40 and replaces an off-the-shelf model that weighed 6 pounds and retailed for about \$275. He heads down the trail with a pack that's 13 percent of the weight and 4 percent of the cost of a mass-produced version, yet his works just as well. His self-made sleeping bag—a quilt, actually—sleeps two, weighs 1.8 pounds, and cost \$15 to make.

All together, he figures his self-made gear saves him almost 17 pounds in pack weight and about \$1,500 in actual retail costs. "The equipment is only the means to an end," he



The many faces of Ray (clockwise from top): Hitting the trail near his present-day home in Oregon, wearing his homemade pack with 9 pounds of gear while a friend carries a typical 40-pound load; climbing Peru's Nevado Huascaran in 1969 on the trip that would eventually cause him to redirect his life; an assortment of the controversial camming devices dubbed "friends"; tackling a hairy 5.12 route in Yosemite, 1977.



says. "I've seen all kinds of gear travel the full length of these trails. The important thing is to go." By way of example he points to his role model, Emma "Grandma" Gatewood, who hiked the Appalachian Trail for fun three times, once when she was 70 years old. She wore Keds, used a shower curtain for a shelter, and carried all her gear in a stuff sack-like bag she made and slung over her shoulder. "Most



people are pantywaists," she once told Jardine.

The real and honest fact is, Grandma Gatewood could have hiked the Gore-Tex off most of us. She was into the experience and could have cared less about how she looked, an ideology that's shared by The Ray Way. Jardine says we should shift the focus from "back here" (the gear or the weight of it) to out there—to the environment, the wilderness, which is the reason for going in the first place. We're too attached to our cool gear, and Jardine just wants you to know you might be a better wilderness traveler if you left some of it home.

Is The Ray Way for everyone? Probably not because elements of The Ray Way can be risky without the skills to use them. For instance, you can't leave your sturdy boots home and hike in sneakers until you've strengthened your ankles and reduced your packweight. Similarly, you can't forsake the tent in favor of a lightweight tarp unless you've learned how to pick the proper campsite. Jardine is quite aware that his tarp won't protect him from nasty weather, so he looks for low, sheltered places—he calls them stealth sites—until better weather comes along. Practice and style go hand in hand with Jardine's lightweight approach, as does a different frame of mind.

"When you're traveling light," he explains, "not only are you more in tune with the weather, but you're able to take evasive action quickly, to find a more sheltered area. We had one snowstorm at 13,000 feet on the Continental Divide Trail. With our light gear, we couldn't tolerate that, so we had to go back down and bivvy until the weather improved. But down low, our simple, well-ventilated tarp shelter kept us drier than a lot of tents would have. The system will work, if you work with it."

Traveling light is only one component of The Ray Way, though. Good nutrition, safety, and an understanding of the psychological factors that come into play on a long hike are also part of the package. The key, Jardine stresses, is to choose what suits you. "The ideas in my book are like fruit on a produce stand. Even though each component fits into an overall system, people can take what they want from my ideas, and integrate that into their own style. Put what you want in your shopping basket, and leave the rest."

Despite his take-it-or-leave-it attitude, some of Jardine's suggestions were interpreted by others as radical, even dangerous. From more traditional backpackers came an angry backlash that frankly surprised him. Jardine recognized the landscape, though, because being in the crossfire of controversy was familiar ground. In some ways it was inevitable that he would end up there. When an intellect as big and unencumbered by conventional thinking as Jardine's is focused on a problem, the solution is going to be original, possibly even spectacular, and probably socially unacceptable.

IN 1977 JARDINE SENT A SHOCK wave through the climbing world by putting up the hardest climbing route ever done to that point in time. It was the culmination of nearly a decade spent in the Yosemite Valley climbing progressively harder routes, pushing the limits of what was technically possible. Those were years, remembered fondly now, spent in the company of a close circle of climbing buddies. "We'd meet each morning at the cafeteria to decide what we'd climb that

JARDINE'S GEAR, PCT THRU-HIKE 1994

(not including food, water, and clothing worn)

	Weight (oz)
Pack	13.5
Umbrella	9.0
Mylar umbrella covering, with rubber bands and tape for attaching Mylar to umbrella	0.8
Sleeping quilt: Primaloft synthetic fill, includes mosquito netting. 79" long, 58" chest, 44" foot	49.0
Sleeping bag stuff sack	2.5
Stove, fuel, windscreen, in coated nylon stuff sack	24.8
Water bottle (empty soda bottle)	1.6
Hat: fleece	1.2
Shell jacket: breathable nylon	6.0
Mittens: fleece	1.0
Shell pants: breathable nylon	3.0
Socks: 2 pair thin nylon	1.2
Shower booties, coated nylon	0.8
Face towel: cotton, 12" square	1.8
Clothing stowbag (plastic garbage sack)	1.3
Ditty Bag #1, nylon mesh	0.2
Windex for cleaning eyeglasses and camera lens*	0.8
Half a cotton bandanna for cleaning eyeglasses and camera lens	0.1
Compass	0.8
Spoon: Lexan	0.2
Prescription dark glasses	1.2
Eyeglasses bag	0.2
Flashlight with single AAA battery and spare bulb	1.0
Spare flashlight battery, size AAA	0.5
Pocketknife	0.8
Toothbrush	0.1
Dental floss	0.1
H2O2 (antiseptic) in small plastic bottle	0.5
Cord	0.5
Ditty Bag #2	0.6
Medical kit: Betadine, Metronidazol, Dissorb, Amoxicillin, Campho-Phenique antibiotic, zinc oxide, Mycelex (for athlete's foot), 1 T. salt in tiny resealable plastic bag	4.0
Sewing kit: heavy thread, 3 safety pins, 3 needles	0.1
Emergency fire starter kit in resealable plastic bag: small lighter, stick matches, birthday candles	0.9
Valuables: traveler's checks, cash, credit card, driver's license, in resealable plastic bag	1.0
Toilet kit: toilet paper & Dr. Bronner's soap in plastic vial	2.0
Journal pad, maps, & pen	2.0

TOTAL PACK WEIGHT 8.44 POUNDS

From The Pacific Crest Trail Hiker's Handbook, \$18.95, Adventure Lore Press, P.O. Box 804, LaPine, OR 97739; <http://members.aol.com/advenlore>.

* = homemade gear *Jenny carried a 6-ounce camera as part of her 7.1 pound load

day. It sure beat going to work."

Jardine's stint in the 9-to-5 world had ended, and his odyssey through the various disciplines of the outdoor world had begun, in 1969. Fresh off a climbing vacation in South

When they set out on the AT with homemade packs that weighed less than 15 pounds each, other thru-hikers said, "You'll never make it." The lightweight gear "left us open to outright scorn," says Jardine.

America, he returned to his cubicle at Southern California's Martin Marietta where he was a space-flight mechanics systems analyst. He took one look at the piles of computer print-outs and realized the life he wanted was to be found elsewhere.

"The whole world is out there," he remembers thinking, "and here I am in my sterile cubicle. I'm going to have to do the unthinkable." He knew he had no choice. To the enduring shock of his employer and family, he got up, followed his heart, and walked away from a secure and lucrative career.

He wandered around the Cascades and Rockies, working as an Outward Bound instructor for a while before winding up in Yosemite Valley, where he discovered rock climbing and started designing equipment for the sport (when he wasn't hang gliding off the local precipices or sea kayaking in Mexico). He'd been drawn to Yosemite, the crucible of climbing, by the long, smooth cracks that abound in its sheer walls. One route in particular caught his eye, a line above Cascade Falls no one had climbed. Jardine made dozens of attempts on the seemingly impossible crack and in 1977 finally succeeded. The Phoenix, as he dubbed it, was the world's first 5.13 climb, and what had made it possible was a radical new mechanical contraption of Jardine's own inventing.

During the Yosemite years, Jardine had experimented with various devices to protect a climber from falling, particularly out of cracks. Existing protection, such as pitons, bongs, and hexcentrics, had a nasty way of working free, leaving the climber dangerously exposed. After tedious trial-and-error he eventually perfected a spring-loaded cam design that could fit cracks of varying widths yet still withstand the force generated by a falling climber. He called the devices "friends."

Some climbers embraced friends for what they could do—reliably protect a climber on the most difficult routes. Jim Bridwell, undisputed dean of Yosemite climbers and the man who just barely beat out Jardine for the first one-day ascent of The Nose on El Capitan, said friends were the "greatest advance in climbing since nylon ropes."

Others, however, considered them unethical and said using friends was akin to cheating. Royal Robbins, grand master of the climbing world, wrote that the new cams made



Partners in adventure: Ray and Jenny (above) test his latest sea kayak design before heading to the Arctic, summer 1997. Ray crosses paths with hiker Bill Irwin (left) and his guide dog Orient on their respective thru-hikes of the Appalachian Trail, 1993. Both were on personal quests—Jardine to perfect his ultra-light concepts, Irwin to be the first sight-impaired person to thru-hike the AT—and each succeeded.

climbing "too easy." Ray Jardine found himself in the middle of a raging controversy.

"Ray was advancing the sport more than any other person at the time," said Bridwell. "When you do that, you're going to take some shots. Sure, it was controversial, but there's no turning back the clock. Everybody started using [friends]."

By the time friends became an indispensable item on every climber's rack, Jardine wasn't around to see it. With the realization that he'd done what he wanted to do at Yosemite, he knew it was time to move on to new adventure. Using proceeds from the licensing of friends, Jardine bought a 50-foot sailboat suffering from a lot of what he called "deferred maintenance." Months of repair were required to make it seaworthy, but eventually he and Jenny set off on a voyage around the world.

For more than three years they sailed through a "world without boundaries," stopping for months at a time in South Africa, in the Caribbean, and in other ports of call that struck their fancy. It was, says Jardine, the freest he's ever felt. The couple survived hurricanes, typhoons, and one memorable electrical storm so intense the boat's rigging glowed with St. Elmo's fire and all the on-board electronics fried, including the radio. At that moment, utterly alone on the vast ocean,

Jardine was surprised to find himself calm, almost relieved. "With the radio gone, the satellite navigation gone, everything gone, it was...simpler. Jenny and I were confident we could take care of ourselves, even under those circumstances. We had come a long way, and we had learned to work together."

That partnership would soon be put to the full test as Jardine's focus began to shift once again. "After more than three years, the ocean can start to seem a sterile and austere place," says Jardine. "Jenny and I began to dream of spending a long time in the mountains. So we decided to head for California, sell the boat, and hike the full length of the Pacific Crest Trail."

When Ray and Jenny finally hit the PCT after a full year of physical conditioning to make up for the years spent in the tight confines of a sailboat, their course was slow and erratic. They took frequent short cuts and "long cuts," detours off the main trail for the sake of scenery or even whim. In 1991, they hiked the trail a second time, this time sticking strictly to the PCT itself.

The following summer, the pair hiked the Continental Divide Trail, a cobbled-together network of existing trails that runs from Mexico to Canada mostly along the crest of the Rocky Mountains. By then a long-distance veteran, Jardine had begun not just formulating his system for long hikes, but implementing it. Both Ray and Jenny felt that the next logical

PUTTING THE RAY WAY TO THE TEST You Can Leave Home Without It

Ray Jardine shakes his head at the things hikers do to reduce packweight. He's seen them cut off toothbrush handles and trim the margins off maps, then proceed to heft a 60-pound pack on a weekend trip. Hikers, he says, grow attached to their gear after using it, seeing others use it, or seeing it advertised. "Marketers' hype," he thinks, saps a person's objectivity about the weight of a given piece of equipment versus its utility. There is a better way.

Start with the smallest, lightest, best-made backpack you can find, rather than opting for a backpack designed to shoulder heavy loads. When you're limited in what you can carry, says Jardine, you're forced to think long and hard about any gear you bring.

Next, scrutinize the heaviest items you carry. While you may not be inclined to go all the way Ray and sleep beneath a tarp instead of a tent, at least choose the lightest pack, tent, and sleeping bag your budget allows. The weight savings on these big items can really add up. For instance, an ensemble consisting of a 3-pound pack, a 3½-pound tent, and a 2½-pound sleeping bag would spare the average backpacker about 10 pounds.

Forget the home-style amenities, too, like candle lanterns and self-inflating pads, to realize further weight savings. "Adjust your mindset to accommodate the wilderness environment. That way you won't miss the things you left behind and can instead enjoy the hiking," says Jardine. For him that amounts to a pack that weighs under 9 pounds, excluding food and water.

To see what The Ray Way is really about, I put it to the test. Into a formerly retired daypack I stuffed a bivy bag (I don't have any tarps), a lightweight down sleeping bag (1½ pounds), a butane stove with one half-full canister of gas and a titanium pot, a fleece sweater, synthetic long johns, and an uncoated nylon

step was to head East and hike the Appalachian Trail.

When they set off from Georgia on June 7, 1993, Ray and Jenny were putting his go-light system to its first real test. Each of their packs weighed less than 15 pounds, including food, a feat achieved in part by starting late in the season to avoid carrying heavy winter clothing and gear. Hikers along the trail took one look at their homemade packs—little more than daypacks, actually—and couldn't believe the pair was thru-hiking the trail.

"Other hikers thought we were slack-packing or dayhiking," remembers Jardine. "The ones who did believe we were going all the way said, 'You'll never make it.' It was strange. Our lightweight gear left us open to outright scorn."

But Jardine had calculated the daily mileage he and Jenny could cover with their light loads. And the relatively short distance between resupply stations in the densely populated East made it possible for them to travel even lighter. Jardine cut the hipbelts off their packs because their light loads made them unnecessary. They hiked in running shoes, taking most of the weight off their feet, where it really counted. Both had umbrellas, modified by Jardine, which enabled them to hike in light rain or drizzle, and do so in perfect comfort. They did, however, make one bold decision they would soon regret.

"Too bold," laughs Jardine. They decided to hike the entire AT without a stove. They stayed healthy, but they'll

anorak and wind pants. Onto the outside I strapped a three-quarter length foam pad (ok, I cheated on that one). For an overnight in high summer, my pack weighed 11 pounds, until I added Ramen noodles, oatmeal and a couple of lunches, bringing it to almost 14 pounds.

That was it. The Ray Way is merciless.

At the Colchuck Lake trailhead outside of Seattle, I laced up a pair of running shoes and started up the well-trodden trail. The rig was probably 10 to 15 pounds lighter than my regular weekend pack, and when I reached the lake 4 hours later the difference was pleasantly obvious. What really struck me was the way my feet felt. I use lightweight fabric hiking boots most of the time anyway, but the weight savings of going with running sneakers made a dramatic difference in energy expended. I felt light on my feet but sure-footed. Real food for thought here.

I suffered no ill-effects from my go-light overnight excursion. My clothing was fine in the mild weather, even at 5,500 feet. I never rolled over on an ankle. And threatening thunderstorms steered clear, so my marginal shelter wasn't tested. I did run out of cooking gas before the oatmeal water was ready, so saving the weight of another canister cost me there.

Another 10 pounds or so would have made little difference on an overnight hike such as mine: Any reasonably fit person could have handled the load with no problem. But as I flew back down the trail feeling outrageously unencumbered in running shoes and a daypack, I couldn't help but think about attempting something like the Pacific Crest Trail. Jardine's techniques are all oriented for the long haul. This liberating feeling of weightlessness on the trail, day after day, might make a journey like that something else entirely. It might make it a lot more fun.

—Peter Potterfield

Was Jardine's departure from climbing and hiking hastened by the controversies? Maybe, although he won't admit it. "The thing I can't understand is why people get so upset at my ideas."

never do it that way again. "The weight savings wasn't worth it," he says. "We felt like we could have made the journey even more quickly if we had cooked food to eat for breakfast and dinner, which I now think is better and more appetizing. It was a good lesson."

Speed wasn't the point of their trip, it was merely a by-product of The Ray Way. Jardine hates power hiking and thinks it's poor technique to "get the RPMs up," as he puts it. Instead, the couple's rapid progress was the result of putting in more hours on the trail. Simply put, they could hike longer each day without getting tired because they weren't encumbered with heavy packs. That in turn enabled them to enjoy the experience more.

"We started behind virtually every thru-hiker on the trail that year," says Jardine. "But by the time we reached Katahdin, we had passed all but a handful. The thing is, we never passed anyone *on* the trail. We move too slowly for that. We passed them while they were resting, or sleeping, or taking layover days because they were all so tired from lugging those huge packs."

The AT hike validated Jardine's new techniques, and a "cruise" of the PCT in the summer of 1994—Jenny and Ray's final long-distance hike—confirmed it once again. Jardine was deluged with mail as *The Pacific Crest Trail Hiker's Handbook* became more widely read. As he settled in as president of the trail group he founded, the American Long Distance Hiker's Association (ALDHA), he tried to answer all the letters. He was pleased to see that as more and more hikers tried his ideas, the response to the book was shifting from outright ridicule to deep gratitude.

"I was hiking the AT the same year as you," begins a typical letter, this one from Mark Welch, dated August 1996. "I had no idea who you were, but I was loaded down with about 60 pounds and you both had on what looked like day-packs. I thought to myself, 'Holy Cow, what a couple of yahoos!' After you passed me I started reading your entries and was awestruck at your daily mileage. After reading your book it just amuses the heck out of me that I was pretty much the idiot."

FOUR YEARS HAVE PASSED SINCE RAY JARDINE last strapped on a pack for a long-distance hike. Given his history, it was predictable that he would drift away from long-distance hiking. With the noise and clamor of the hiking community sounding a lot like the sound and fury in Yosemite after his "friends" appeared, his already waning interest in hiking was further diminished. Jardine soon distanced himself from the discussion generated by his book and from groups like ALDHA that he'd fostered.

Today he lives with Jenny, his partner in adventure, in a quiet, sparsely populated corner of the Northwest. His modest house and cavernous workshop stand on a few acres of lodgepole pine, not far from the mountains and forests he loves. It's an abode that fits his frugal and unpretentious style. Jardine, who's more comfortable outdoors than in, often sleeps in a tent in the backyard. He seems content at home, absolutely focused on the details of his next wilderness adventure, which will take him and Jenny through some of the most remote and unforgiving land in the world. But he won't be going there on foot. Shortly after leaving behind

the backpacking world, Jardine turned the considerable wattage of his full attention to a new outdoor enthusiasm: Arctic kayaking.


This fall he and Jenny returned from their third year in the Arctic, having paddled from Washington State, through Alaska, to the Mackenzie Delta. With 6,000 miles under their spray skirts so far, they're halfway through a treacherous retracing of the Northwest Passage. Each day in the Arctic, Ray and Jenny would don survival suits and paddle through what is literally ice water. Their only company might be beluga whales or grizzlies on shore. It's a deadly environment with no margin for error. Roll your boat trying to get through the surf to camp and, if you can't start a fire quickly, you die of hypothermia.

Before each voyage Jardine heads to his workshop to build a new, improved kayak, but only after redrafting it with a computer program he wrote in his previous life as an aerospace engineer. His latest design is shaped by the lessons learned from the preceding summer's trip. It's classic Jardine: imagination and application, honed by experience. Describing the tedious task of designing his kayak, his eyes burn with the same enthusiasm they show when he remembers the process of developing "friends" climbing protection or recalls figuring out how to get by on a long hike with less in his pack or on his feet than others of us can possibly imagine.

When asked what drives this outrageous immersion in adventure, his response is quick and unequivocal: "It's just a plain, bottom-level love of nature. I think that's a primal instinct we all have, maybe I just have more of it. I've lived it, I know how much being in the wilderness can enrich my life."

It's clear, too, that Jardine thrives on challenge, on the process of taking on a completely new set of problems and applying his irresistible logic to solving them. When he left Yosemite, he had done the hardest climb in the world and invented a device that would change the sport forever. He never again could do anything truly new in climbing, only repeat what he already had done. And after hiking the longest trails in America, some of them three times, he had reduced packweight to less than most people thought was possible. He had developed a system of interlocking techniques that virtually guaranteed not just success, but success with pleasure.

Was Jardine's departure from the worlds of climbing and hiking hastened by the controversy that accompanied both exits? Maybe, although Jardine won't admit to it. By the same token, he's not unmindful of the impact crater he's left on the modern outdoor world as he's followed an irresistible internal urge toward new and ever-changing challenges. "The thing I can't understand," he says finally, "is why people get so upset at my ideas."

"My philosophy is to think for myself. My goal is my own enjoyment in the wilderness, and that's based on reality as I find it. No one else can live my life for me, or for you. In the end, you can't worry about what other people think, you've just got to do what you feel is right." 

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