

Andrew Skurka

HIKED NORTH AMERICA COAST-TO-COAST

On July 10, Andrew Skurka poured a small flask of Atlantic Ocean seawater over his head. He was standing in the Pacific surf on Washington's Olympic Peninsula after carrying the water all the way across the continent — from Quebec's Cape Gaspe — on foot. The baptism marked the end of the Seekonk, Massachusetts, native's epic 7,778-mile, 339-day hike inaugurating the Sea-to-Sea Route, America's latest ultralong ramble. Why does a 23-year-old set off on a lonely, 11-month walk? The recent Duke grad was facing a future of entry-level cubicles when he decided to take a year off to tie together the network of historic trails that crisscross the U.S. into the Sea-to-Sea Route. Others had proposed it, even mapped it, but no one had actually walked it. Long-distance hiking is a fairly new pursuit for Skurka: He was a hotshot runner in high school, and competed in college, but he had never tried an extended multiday trek when he dove headfirst into the Appalachian Trail in 2002. He blitzed the 2,168-mile route in 95 days, but not without learning some hard lessons. "I had zero experience in backpacking," he says. "I started the A.T. with a 50-pound pack and still didn't have what I needed. I finished the Sea-to-Sea with a 10-pound pack full of Galtie gear — and I had too much stuff." Skurka's average of 23 miles per day on the Sea-to-Sea isn't shabby, considering he had to snowshoe 1,400 miles, camp out in minus-20 degree weather, and go for days without a shower or human contact. It's starting to pay off: Skurka recently landed a job at Backpacking Light magazine in Bozeman, Montana, and will start a cross-country slide show about his adventures in January. After that he's hoping a book deal will stave off Cubicle-land just a little bit longer. Is another long-term adventure in the cards? "I'm not all that excited about sacrificing another 11 months of my life on the trail," he says. But shorter, more intense trips are on the horizon: "I'm not hanging up my shoes."

SKURKA WEARS A JACKET BY GOLTIE, \$425; SWEATER BY EDDIE BAUER, \$39; T-SHIRT BY PEANUTS, \$14; DAWGAGE, \$24; PANTS BY GAP, \$70; SNEAKERS BY VANS, \$57; MOTORRIZER BY BROTHER HONNE.

