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Running



Victoria Davis



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INSPIRATION

The Inspiration Driving America's Strongest Female Thru-Hiker

Heather Anderson became the only woman to complete the Calendar-Year Triple Crown in 2018, which requires nearly 8,000 miles of hiking in eight months.

Known as “Anish” on hiking trails across the United States, backpacker and trail runner Heather Anderson gave herself the name in honor of her great-grandmother’s Native American Anishinaabe heritage. Anderson also made a name for herself this year by becoming the first woman to complete the Calendar-Year Triple Crown, which involves hiking the [Appalachian Trail](#) (2,190 miles), the [Pacific Crest Trail](#) (2,650 miles) and the Continental Divide trails (3,100 miles) all in one season (she began in March and finished in early November).

“I would have done all these things regardless of whether there was a title for it or not,” said Anderson, who has hiked nearly 30,000 miles since 2003. “Especially with long-distance stuff, the thing that feels surreal is being done and not getting up the next day and doing it again. It’s such a long journey and it just sort of alters your perception of day-to-day life when you live out in the woods for months on end. It can be really hard to go back to civilization and forget that experience. I think that’s what feels more surreal than any completion or accomplishment.”

Whether she’s braving the Sierra summits of Yosemite Valley, circumnavigating around Mount Rainier’s 14,400-foot volcano or exploring the Big Cypress National Preserve in southern Florida, Anderson says that picking her favorite trail “is like asking a parent who their favorite child is.” Each trail, with its rocky terrains and trying conditions, has given Anderson a unique experience and a reason to love long-distance hiking.

“I love all the different trails I’ve done for different reasons, and they’re all set apart in cultural aspects, too,” Anderson said. “They all just made me want to be out there more and more. That’s the thing about hiking: the more you’re out, the more you want to be out. The adventure aspect is pretty addicting.”



Photo provided by Heather "Anish" Anderson.

Though she lives in Seattle, Wash., now, Anderson grew up in Michigan, where she says hiking wasn't considered a serious pursuit. Anderson didn't grow up in an active or athletic family, and it wasn't until she took a summer college job working at the Grand Canyon that she caught the trailblazer bug.

"It's hard not to fall in love with hiking when you're someplace like the Grand Canyon. I mean, it's so beautiful," Anderson said. "I didn't even know trails like the Pacific Crest or Continental Divide even existed until I got out there and other hikers told me about the trails. I was always like, 'Great, sign me up!' Any time something new came up I wanted to do that, too."

Since beginning her journey 15 years ago, Anderson has not only completed the Triple Crown three times over (becoming a "Triple Triple Crown" finisher in the process), but also earned the self-supported fastest known time (FKT) on the Pacific Crest Trail in 2013, hiking the trail in 60 days, 17 hours and 12 minutes, which broke the previous men's record by four days and established the trail's first female record. Anderson also earned the female self-supported FKT on the Appalachian Trail in 2015 and on the Arizona Trail in 2016. She's since written a book about her 2013 FKT *Thirst: 2600 Miles to Home*, which is expected to release in March 2019.

"I always knew I was going to write a book about it. It just took me a really long time to get to the point where I was ready to sell it and put it out there," Anderson said. "It started as something I was just writing for myself but I felt that I'd learned so much through that experience and I think there are a lot of people who can draw inspiration from my story. Last year I finally decided I wanted to put that out there for everyone."

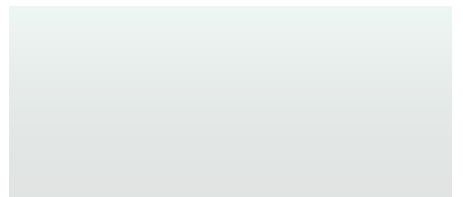
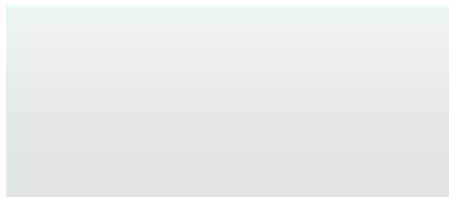
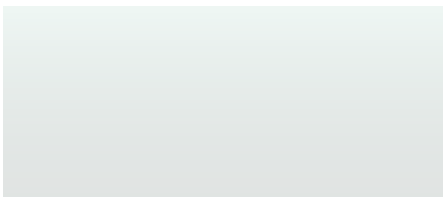
Anderson also uses her own at-home personal training business to inspire and encourage others in their long-distance hiking pursuits. Anderson primarily works with clients she describes as "non-traditional hikers," sharing with them her expertise in both strength training and confidence building.

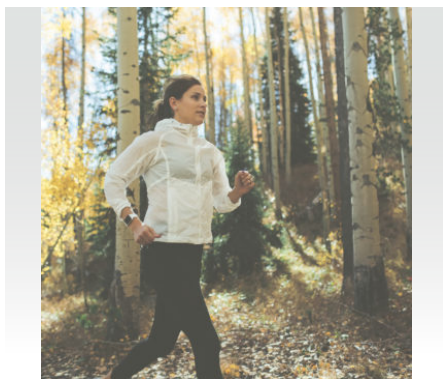
"A lot of the women I work with are empty nesters or past middle age who are looking to do their first long-distance backpacking trip now that they're retired and their kids are grown," Anderson said. "I was very sedentary and overweight when I first started hiking and I didn't have a lot of support or encouragement. Nobody in my family or any of my friends thought that I could do the long-distance hikes, so I had to be brave enough to go on my own. Because of that, I've really enjoyed being my clients' cheerleaders and giving them the encouragement they need."

In the future, Anderson hopes to write another book about this year's Calendar-Year Triple Crown success, but she's taking it "one book at a time" and giving herself some much-needed rest before planning any more big hikes.

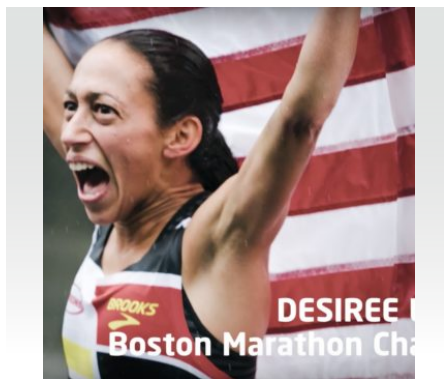
"This was a really big year, so I'm just resting right now and trying to resist the urge to start planning the next giant adventure," Anderson said. "I think next year I'm just going to focus on a lot of smaller stuff, just playing and having fun in the mountains and not necessarily having any big goals. We'll see how that evolves."

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