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# Backpackers find cheap thrills

## Four discover inexpensive outdoor exercise

By MIKE KOLAR

Most people feel that spring break is a time to either work or rest. The biggest problem may be in choosing between two kinds of six-packs.

For four Aggies however, the biggest problem was in staying alive.

The four roommates, Randy Miller, Dave Perelli, Phil Shimer and Keith Kipp, drove to Big Bend National Park where they spent five days backpacking.

The four hiked over 26 miles during the five days through trails of desert wastes, mountain ranges and dried creek beds.

"We decided to do this because we usually do something over the break," Perelli said. "It was also very cheap."

"Backpacking is not really a pleasure sport like boating or fishing," Miller said. "You go to a reserve like Big Bend and sign in at the Ranger station. You give your name and the number of days you plan to be out. If you don't come in, this way they can look for you."

At a national reserve like Big Bend, the hiking trails are not like major highways in their comforts.

"We traveled for five days and we saw only three other people on the trail during that time," Shimer said. "It's not that there aren't many people out there, it's just that there are so many miles of trail."

"At the base camp of the Chisos Mountain Trails, the name for all the hiking trails in the park, there's a restaurant, motel cabins, stores and a lodge. There were many people there, including many other Aggies, but on a trail a mile away, someone could be dying and no one would know it."

"It's not really a good place for a honeymoon," Miller added, "but then again, it just might be."

While on the trails, the four carried about 40 pounds of weight on their back. Usually waking at about ten each morning, the group would eat and then walk along the trails until they came to a spring where they would make camp until the next day.

Finding a spring which was not dry was not always easy.

"Springs were marked on a map, but there was no way of knowing whether the spring was running or not," Kipp said. "When we'd find a dry one, we'd have to walk on another three or four miles until the next one."

The combination of heat and hard terrain made hiking the trails difficult.

"In the desert part of the trails, the temperature was above 100, while in the higher mountain areas, the temperature would get down into the 40's," Perelli said.

"You had to walk with your head down," Kipp said. "The footing was so bad that you'd fall if you looked up. We carried along two quarts of water for each person and refilled the containers as much as possible. We always kept five quarts of water on hand in case of an emergency."

"We really didn't travel in one bunched-up group," Shimer said. "It was fairly easy to get lost. We met two other people who said they'd been lost for over 24 hours. We even got lost for a couple of hours. We took a trail which led nowhere and couldn't find the main trail back. The

main trails are marked with blue tags on trees or with rocks piled up high along the trail. Sometimes, there wouldn't be a marker for a quarter of a mile or so. That's when you really get worried."

Sound will not travel very well because of the mountains. Getting lost and staying lost really becomes a problem to the backpackers.

"It was kind of scary," Miller said. "We became so dependent on water. Our food, which was the concentrated, freeze-dried kind, even needed water to be eaten. If we couldn't find water, we were slightly in trouble."

"We took a compass, but when you came to a spring that was dry, you couldn't go and sell your compass for a glass of water," Perelli said.

All four agreed on certain

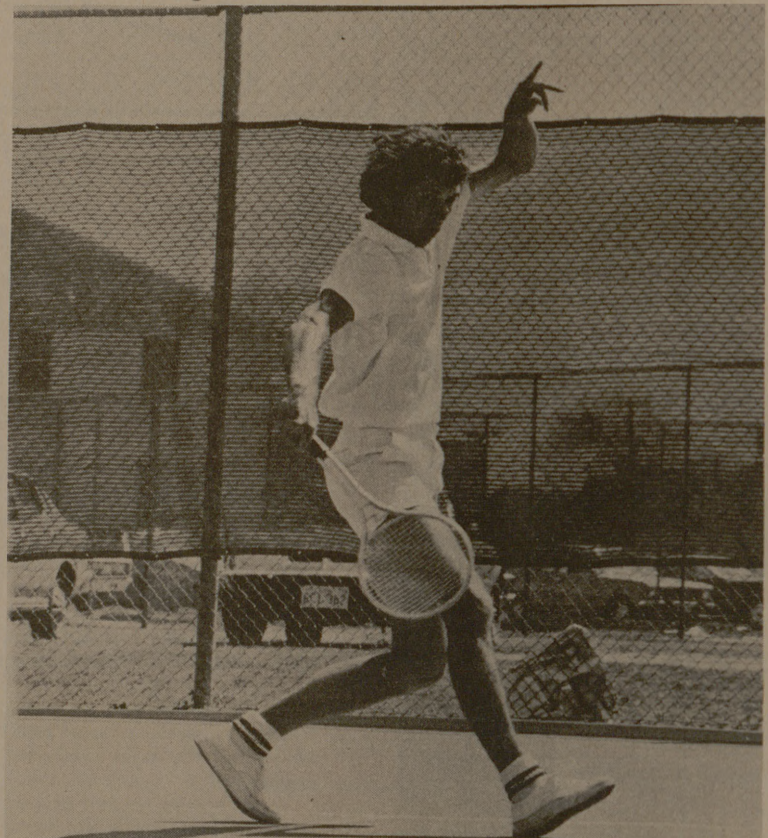
things which would be necessary to anyone considering a backpacking trip. A good pack, a first-aid kit, concentrated foods, many pairs of socks and a good pair of boots.

Another item considered to be important was many packages of M&M's.

"I really looked forward to the rest breaks," Miller said. "We'd eat M&M's and drink water. That really kept me going. The M&M's give you energy and they're a chocolate which won't melt."

"The humor on the trip kept me going," Kipp said. "Everyone seemed to be in good spirits even though we were so close to danger. I really think the humor kept me going."

"The thing that kept Phil (Shimer) going," Perelli said, "was the two cases of Coors waiting at the truck."



DAN COURSON balances for a backhand smash in preparation for today's match with North Texas State. The Ags face Southwestern Louisiana in a dual match at the varsity courts at 9 a.m. Friday. (Photo by Kathy Curtis)

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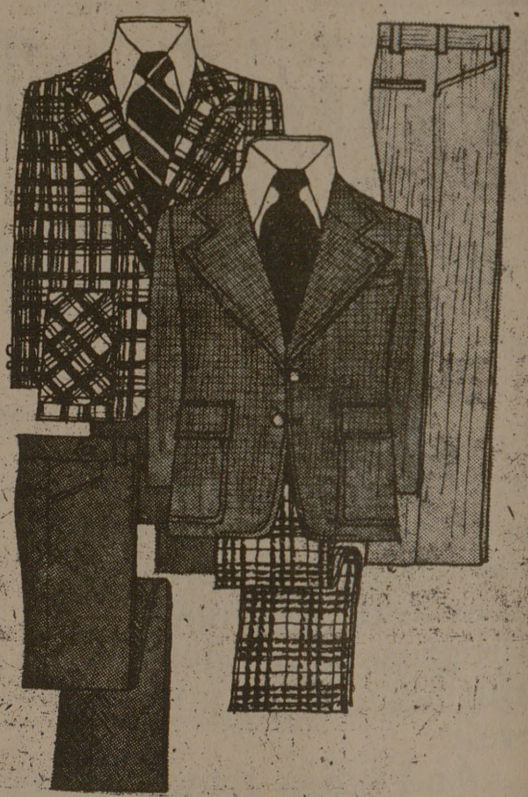
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