

Cirque of The Towers

With daughters, in Wyoming's Wind River Range.

Article & Photography by Chris Morgan

No matter the season, my family and I usually have packs attached to our backs and are tromping around the West. Winter is filled with backcountry skiing and spring is our time for rock climbing. Summer is the special time—that's when we escape the hot valleys and head into remote mountain ranges where fish thrive in aqua-blue lakes and tumbling streams. We hike long distances and wake to the metallic chill of high mountain air.

Our planning begins early in the year with ideas spoken outloud around the dinner table. By the time our clocks jump forward and the crocuses arrive I'm scratching out a tentative list of places we'll fish. Hours are burned scouring online articles, reading trip reports and mining information from friends. Slowly, that list morphs into a catalog of adventures, which are whittled down to a realistic goal. By Mother's Day it's usually official—we have a plan and now we need to stick to it.





Mountain silence is part of the allure, and my youngest daughter and I relish it. The drone of electronics that is so overwhelming at home is minimized—we only play music on her phone as we prep for dinner, all after long days of fishing and exploring remote basins.

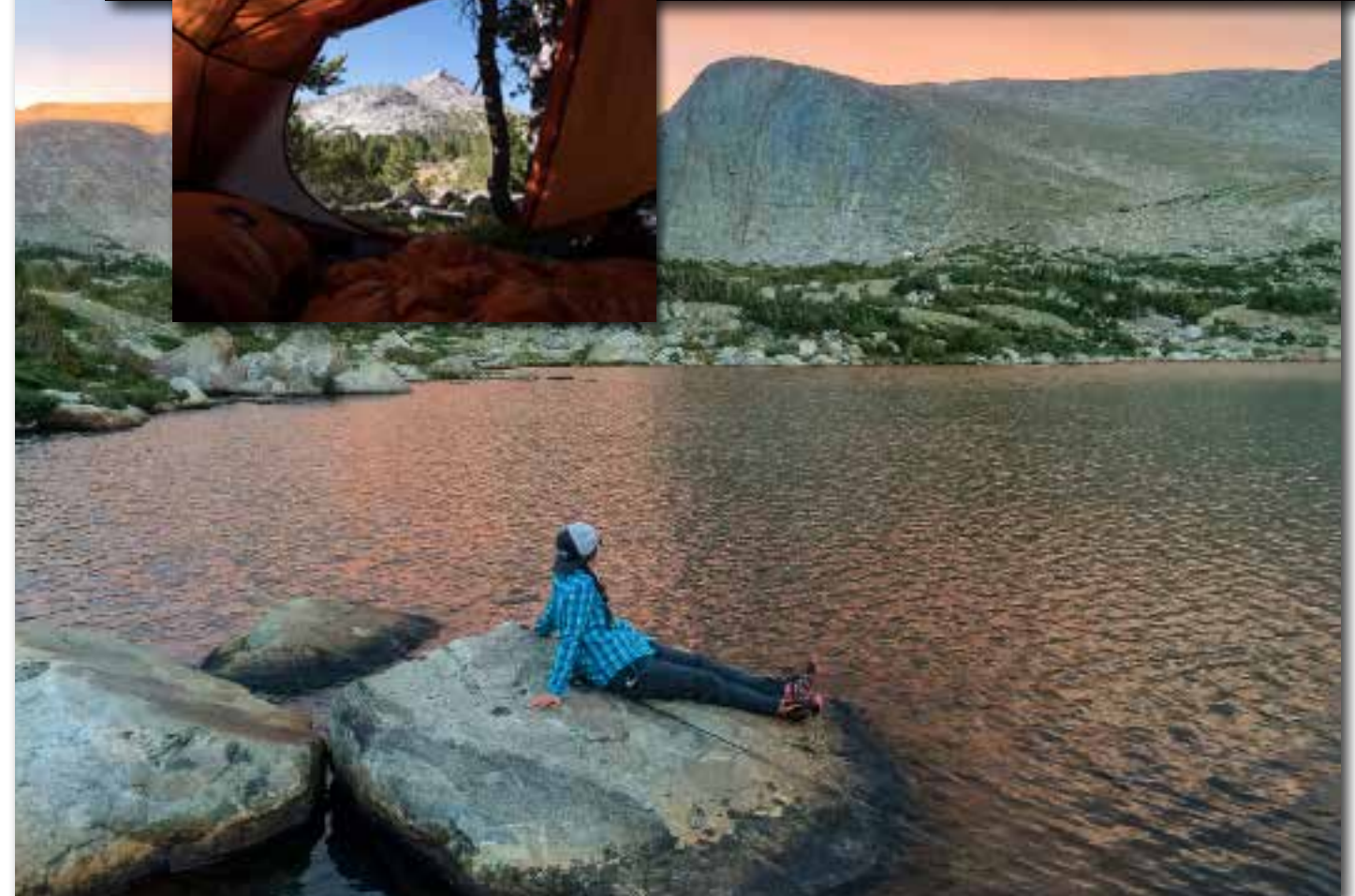
There are different types of silence. The still silence of morning is different from the calm silence of a lakeshore at midday, which is different from the empty silence at night. We know this mountain silence is a temporary, magical time. We can't stay here forever, just several short days during a two-month window when the western mountains open up for us to explore.



We rarely enjoy campfires on our trips. Instead, we opt for strolls after dinner sometimes sneaking in a few casts before the light fades. We time our walks so we can bask in the orange alpenglow and absorb the evening stillness. This is the time we talk, recounting fun moments from the day, and discussing plans for the next.

Back at the tent we drink hot tea and gaze up while the stars slowly poke holes in the darkening sky. By the time we've crawled into our tent the sky is blanketed in stars and the Milky Way is clear, seemingly close enough to touch. It's easy for the mind to wander, trying to grasp the vastness of this ancient view, and our seemingly insignificant place within it.

When daylight arrives we might get in a few casts and watch the sun rise before donning packs, our minds again full of anticipation. We always make a final pass over our campsite, trying to clean up evidence of our stay. Our goal? We hope the next visitors believe they are the first to ever camp here.





My daughter Emma is a machine, a smiling, laughing, joyful hiking machine who never tires. The mountains supply her with energy, and she in turn shows nothing but respect for the majesty surrounding her.

I feel a bit like an outsider now—she and the mountains have a relationship and they don't really need me. But I also feel pride in being the one who introduced them years ago.

When we begin a trip, Emma knows we have many long days ahead, all defined by the routine of setting up and breaking down camp. Each day is an adventure promising new discoveries. Her senses are always on full alert in the mountains—she's always first to notice a pair of marmots lounging in the distance, or a glowing mass of moss on an ancient tree, or a camouflaged cutthroat cruising across a sandy shallow in search of a meal. She calls the mountains her "happy place" and I smile a lot while watching her here.



These high mountain lakes produce wild trout—cutthroats, brookies and the occasional golden trout. Some make it onto our plates; most are released. These are not the highly educated trout you might find on some famous western river. Instead, these fish provide the best type of fun—they rarely say no to a good cast and readily attack flies. If you want someone to truly enjoy fly fishing, take them here.





Someone once told me that inside every older person is a young person wondering what the heck happened. It's a great reminder that life constantly marches on, and every morning we choose how to live a new day. Life's best moments are those we share with those whose we love, and for me, the people most special in my life are my wife and my daughters.

This summer will be our last before my youngest daughter heads to college. I'm excited she chose a school close to the mountains and will meet a new tribe of young people who share her love for the outdoors. I'm just hoping I'll hear from her next February, with some crazy ideas of places to explore, and by Mother's Day we'll have a trip or two on the calendar, a time and place for her and I to go deep into the mountains and cast our rods on a quiet stream in the middle of nowhere. 🎣

Chris Morgan is a videographer who first spent two decades as a fighter pilot in the US Air Force. After his military career, he traded in his helmet and g-suit for a camera, and now he roams the mountains of the West creating content for clients in the outdoor industry. You can view his work at www.twosherpas.com

