

Plant-Powered Athlete Josh Garrett Attempts Pacific Crest Trail Speed Record

By Forks Over Knives
July 09 2013

On June 10, vegan athlete Josh Garrett set out to hike the Pacific Crest Trail, a grueling 2,655-mile journey from Mexico to Canada. He hopes to break the current speed record for the trail, and to raise awareness for the benefits of a plant-based diet along the way. This Friday Josh expects to cross the Pacific Crest Trail halfway point. We caught up with him earlier in the week and asked him about his lifestyle and his current journey. We were happy to learn that Josh credits Forks Over Knives as a significant part of his inspiration for adopting the vegan lifestyle, which gives him the strength and endurance he needs to meet this challenge.

Why are you vegan?

I am vegan because I love animals and I can't stand to see them suffer. Animals suffer so much on modern factory farms and in slaughterhouses, and its totally unnecessary because we don't have to eat meat or other animal products in order to be healthy. A vegan diet gives us everything we need for the best possible health, fitness, and endurance -- and I hope I can be a good example of that.

Was there a turning point that made you adopt a vegan diet?

I met [animal rights advocate and author] Karen Dawn in November 2011. Karen introduced me to two turkeys she had rescued as a Thanksgiving gesture. They were so sweet and smart and affectionate. I just loved them. Then I saw a fun [video](#) she made that included a short serious segment that showed a turkey slaughterhouse. It showed a worker using turkeys, suspended on a conveyor belt, as live punching bags. It made me sick to the stomach, and I knew I couldn't eat turkey again.

We hear that *Forks Over Knives* played a part in your transition. Is that true?

Absolutely. I had become uncomfortable with eating animals, but I still had this idea that as an athlete I might need to. Then I watched *Forks Over Knives* and realized that it just made no sense to be eating any animal products at all. I realized I didn't need meat or animal products for my health, and I couldn't justify continuing to eat them while calling myself an animal lover.

We understand you teach exercise physiology and are also a college track coach. How has your dietary change affected your own athletic performance?

Yes, I coach track, usually wearing a "No Meat Athlete" t-shirt, and I have fun teasing my guys that they can't keep up with a plant-eater.

But it really become apparent on this hike how fantastic my relatively new lifestyle (I changed 18 months ago) has been for my strength and endurance. Hiking out in the wilderness over 40 miles per day is lonely (other hikers aren't going at my pace) and emotionally difficult, but physically I feel strong.

Please tell us about your hike along the Pacific Coast Trail to raise awareness for vegan living.

John Mackey (CEO of Whole Foods) and I share a passion for hiking and for vegan living. When we hiked a section of the Continental Divide Trail together last year, John noticed my strength. And he knew I had hiked the Pacific Crest Trail in 2009 in 88 days, without making any speed attempt, though the trail takes most people five or six months. So he got the idea that I should go for a record and he said he'd offer whatever support he could if I did.

Were you excited to get out on the Pacific Crest Trail again?

I actually had mixed feelings. This trail is hard even if you aren't going for a record. But I decided that if I could use the journey

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to get the word out about the benefits of plant-based diets I would do it. Then I teamed up with Mercy for Animals, so I am also raising money for that group, which does great work exposing what goes on in factory farms and slaughterhouses. It would be great if some of your readers would consider sponsoring me. They can learn more at <http://www.firstgiving.com/fundraiser/veganhiker/support>.

How long is the hike going to take?

The current speed record is 64 days and eleven hours. I hope to finish in 63. That means I will have to average just over 41 miles per day. That can be hard when you are crossing the desert in summer, or climbing the Sierra Nevada or Cascade Mountain ranges when the peaks are covered in snow. In fact, I had to take a day off the trail in my first week as I got heatstroke crossing the desert, but I have since made up the time. I am feeling stronger every day and did a 44 mile day yesterday. I expect to be back on track for the record, with a 41.2 mile per day average, by the end of this week.

Can we follow you on your hike?

I got [@veganhiker](#) as a Twitter handle. I am not really doing a lot of tweeting, but I may do more. There is a link there to my [Facebook page](#), which is open to the public and being updated regularly.