

I KNEW I WAS A TrailBlazer



▲ Eric and Danielle Hannan

This month, TrailBlazer would like to introduce you to Eric and Danielle Hannan, a couple whose lifelong love of camping turned into a full-timing gig earlier this year. Traveling with their dog, Bailey, the Hannans share their adventures in several online blogs and via Instagram. Be sure to follow their adventure at www.shorelooksnice.com.

TB: How long have you been camping and RVing? Who introduced you to it? Tell us how it all began!

EH: My wife and I both grew up camping with our families. I did a lot of camping in northern Minnesota and she camped in Maryland. When we started dating, camping was one of our favorite activities. I remember one stretch we camped five out of six weekends. Living in Southern

California we were able to tent camp year-round. We camped so often that we had two huge camping bins that we kept in the back of my car so we could be ready to go on a whim to somewhere cool for the weekend. Earlier this year, we packed our stuff into storage, bought an RV and hit the open road as full-timers seeking adventure!

TB: How did you first hear about Thousand Trails?

EH: My wife found Wilderness Lakes online when we were planning a last minute weekend getaway. We had never heard about Thousand Trails until we camped there and then we were hooked. I love scenic hiking and adventure. Danielle loves the amenities like the heated pool, workout equipment, and the community feel. It just made sense for us to join Thousand Trails because it puts me in epic locations and gives my wife all the amenities to enjoy our stay.

TB: What is one of your fondest camping memories? How about one of your fondest TT memories?

EH: There are way too many fond camping memories to fit on the page.

One time I remember, Danielle and I went camping with friends (new friends at the time) Bill and Leighanna Richards to Big Sur. I'll never forget the beauty of that coastline and waking up early to catch the most magnificent sunrise at Pfeiffer Beach. We all bonded so closely over many camping trips over the years that we were in each other's weddings and are still close to this day.

Probably our fondest Thousand Trails memory was fishing at Wilderness Lakes. Because it was our first time at a Thousand Trails preserve we didn't know what to expect. We were pleasantly surprised to be able to fish from our campsite! After dark, they had live music and a lot of friendly people. We made quite a few friends that night and we got our first glimpse into the RV lifestyle.

TB: Any funny camping/RVing stories?

EH: We travel with our dog, Bailey (www.thetravelingpomeranian.com.) Danielle found baby gates that work as the perfect dog gate! They are lightweight and super easy to set up. Well, one day we were at San Benito with a great view of the rolling hills. We were eating and doing things on the laptop when Bailey let out a little growl. She's not a barker or growler so I knew something was up and when I looked up there was a skunk right outside our screen door! All of our windows were wide open too. Not a good situation to be in, ha ha. The skunk had walked into the small area we had left open and couldn't figure out how to get out. So I calmly said to Danielle to walk slowly with Bailey into the bathroom until I come up with a plan. My main concern was Bailey

would bark and startle the skunk. Then I remembered the window up top opens up and I could record the skunk from above in the gate. I pulled out my phone, hit record and stuck my arm out the window to record the skunk running around. I figured if I was going to get sprayed anyways, at least I would have good footage. After a little bit he found his way out and happily ran back to the field. You can watch the footage on our blog at www.shorelooksnice.com.

TB: What type of camper are you/ what equipment do you use? What do you prefer and why? (ex: fifth wheel, RV, tent, cabins, etc.)

EH: We have a 2012 Forest River Sunseeker Class C RV. We call it the "Suhiclad" which stands for Surf, Hike, Climb, Adventure. I prefer the size of our RV because it's large enough for Danielle to feel like a home but it is small enough to fit into cool locations. We also pull our 2012 Mazda 3 behind on a dolly and the power of the RV makes you hardly feel the car behind. We take a lot of day trips with our car when we are RVing. We like to stay for two weeks in a location and really explore the surrounding area by hiking, surfing, biking, etc. Recently, we were at Morgan Hill which is surrounded by beautiful wineries in central California. We went to six beaches, hiked the Redwoods, toured San Francisco, went to a lake, went surfing, and spent time in Santa Cruz.

TB: Where have you gone that you wouldn't have otherwise, if it hadn't been for your Thousand Trails membership?

EH: Pinnacles National Park became a national park in 2011. Being so new, I don't think a lot of people know about it. One morning I went into Pinnacles NP just before sunrise and I was the only car in any of the parking lots. I had the park all to myself. They have a very easy and short hike that anyone can do – it's a loop trail so it puts

you back where you parked and lets you view a lot of the cool sites. I was stunned at the expanse of these rock formations. The caves had bats coming out of them and heading to the reservoir to eat the bugs off the top. I saw wild turkeys and deer. Then I followed the trail which took me up above to look down over the valley of rocks and forest. I watched the sunrise from a rock sticking way out above the valley floor and had a granola bar. What a breathtaking moment! I would have never found this place if the Thousand Trails San Benito campground wasn't just down the street. In fact, I didn't even know about Pinnacles until I was at the campground and Google mapped my location.



▲ Bailey, the Traveling Pomeranian

TB: What is your favorite part about the outdoor lifestyle?

EH: Connecting. Camping is an incredible way to connect with yourself or others. I read a stat a few years ago that camping has been one of the leading activities in happy marriages and families. I know for myself, it's made Danielle and me even closer. But I've realized being in a beautiful area that it's easier to connect with God, nature, Danielle or myself if I choose to just get away. You can slow things down and enjoy the moment.

TB: I knew I was a TrailBlazer when...

EH: Year after year, I went canoeing as a kid for about a week in the Boundary Waters in northern Minnesota. In the Boundary Waters you canoe in and when you get to the end of the lake, you carry your gear and your canoe to the next lake which is usually very close. Then you're on the next pristine lake with loons swimming within feet from your canoe. I had a massive moose swim within a few feet of my canoe as she crossed the lake with her calf. As kids, we would paddle off and go cliff jumping doing tricks into the crystal clear water.

But one morning I had my watch alarm set to get up before the sunrise. I was going to go exploring and fishing. I had convinced a few of my friends to come with but when it was time to get out of bed, they wouldn't come. I was young but I wasn't going to miss this moment, so I went out in the moonlight, collected all my fishing gear I would need to catch "the big one," grabbed a snack and headed out in a canoe to explore. I canoed around this calm, but large, lake filled with tree-filled islands. At one point, I was fishing from my canoe next to a huge cliff with trees all around and while the sun came up I caught a Northern Pike! At that moment, time stopped and I knew I'd be an outdoorsman the rest of my life.

TB: Feel free to share any other camping/RVing stories here.

EH: We love meeting new friends. Feel free to follow us on our website at www.thousandtrails.com and let us know if you're nearby. Happy Traveling!