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New True Adventure Book Proves An Eight-Country Trek Across the Alps Is Far From Just Another “Walk in the Park”

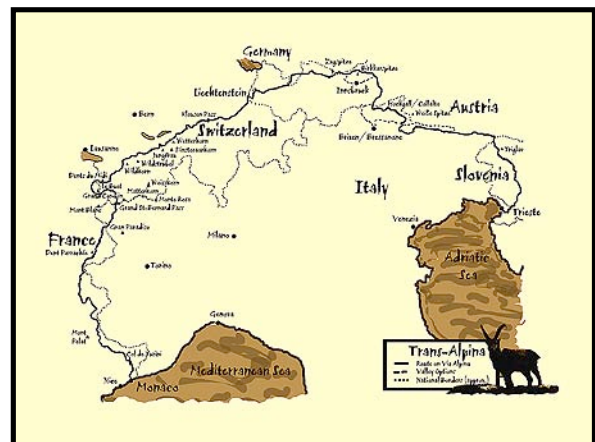
After decades of hiking some of the world’s great trails, adventurer and Lowell Thomas award-winning author Brandon Wilson was excited to hear about the *Via Alpina*, new paths running through eight countries along the backbone of the Alps. Besides promising total immersion into Alpine life and wilderness, he knew it’d be the ultimate adventure. It meant climbing 3000 feet from valley to rugged mountain hut every day—almost 1200 miles—for months. It’d also provide perfect fodder for Wilson’s fourth exciting travel adventure book, **Over the Top & Back Again: Hiking X the Alps**.

Originally, Wilson envisioned it as a European Appalachian Trail, only with better food and wine. Faster than you can say “schnitzel,” he coaxed his desk-jockey wife into leaving their cozy Hawaiian home to join him.

Brandon & his wife Cheryl left Trieste in June 2009 to begin their 111-day thru-hike across Italy, Slovenia, Austria, Germany, Liechtenstein, Switzerland, France, and Monaco—planning to arrive at the Mediterranean Sea in September before snow covered the trail.

Unlike their historic 1992 trek across Tibet, they wouldn’t dodge bullets. But given the climbs, they’d sure miss Sadhu, their Tibetan equine Sherpa.

It was an expedition of highs and lows. The couple trekked the equivalent of halfway across the U.S. over mountain terrains in extreme conditions, from freezing temperatures high atop Alpine passes to dreaded Föhn winds, hail, ice fields, snow, and more than 40 days of rain—and this was summer weather. As always, there were injuries plus the daily mental challenge of completing 20 kilometers, a virtual marathon, knowing it meant climbing yet another formidable mountain again tomorrow. For the record, they ascended and descended 211,000 meters total—the equivalent of climbing 12 Mt. Everests from sea level in just 3 1/2 months. Then again, who knew lethal ticks and cow patties could prove even more dangerous?



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However, it was far from all pain and peril as they hiked in the shadows of Mt. Blanc, the Eiger, Mt. Triglav and the Dolomite Range. Little could compare with the rarefied beauty, serenity, wildlife, legends, delicious cuisine and eccentric folks they'd find along the way. And what a unique and ecological way to witness Alpine culture—one-step-at-a-time.

Asked why they set-off on this quest, Wilson explained, “The Alps are so much more than gnomes and cheese. For folks seeking peace in these difficult times, I can think of no better solution than to simplify, disconnect from the distractions of the world and head off the beaten track. Sure, it was one heckuva challenge, our toughest ever. But ultimately, I hope this tale of our journey will help open this unique trail to others. Plus,” he added, “there’s no better, more exciting, weight loss plan!”

Wilson’s keen eye and dry wit captures it all in **Over the Top & Back Again**, as they witness the Alp’s changing lifestyle and fragile landscape. As with the other three books in this exciting adventure series, each night Wilson chronicled their wild adventures while muscles were still sore and clothes were still wet. It’s all here, the triumphs and “agony of de feet,” captured in his witty, gritty, award-winning style.

Join this intrepid pair, among the first to tackle this route, as they dig deep to confront their most difficult escapade ever. Inspiring, empowering, humorous, (yet slightly crazed), **Over the Top & Back Again** sweeps you along for an unforgettable look at the peerless Alps—and at an everyday couple who once again dare to follow their gonzo dream.

Over the Top & Back Again is the first *Via Alpina* travel narrative book published in English, with 53 photos, maps and custom illustrations by Ken Plumb. It provides a humorous first-hand preview for those who dream of making a similar journey themselves—on foot or maybe just in their mind.

Official expedition sponsors included: GoLite, Gossamer Gear, Omni Resources and Upcountry Fitness, Maui. The couple was also an official partner of the *Via Alpina*. For details about the routes, huts, activities and culture, visit www.via-alpina.org. For more information about the explorers, visit www.pilgrimstales.com.

**To request a review copy or arrange an author interview,
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About the Author

BRANDON WILSON is the Lowell Thomas award-winning author of a series of four travel adventure books, a photographer, explorer and adventure-travel writer whose stories have appeared in international anthologies, magazines and newspapers, and across the Internet. A voracious explorer of nearly 100 countries, he's particularly passionate about inspiring others with the possibility of discovery through long distance trekking.

Born in western Pennsylvania, he developed wanderlust at an early age, and has spent much of his life traveling while not living in Hawaii.



His fascination with what he calls “slow, deliberate travel” began when he and his wife Cheryl became the first western couple to trek a trail 650-miles across the Himalayan Plains from Lhasa, Tibet to Kathmandu in 1992. The peripatetic writer has now thru-hiked ten of the world's great long-distance trails, including the Camino de Santiago twice and Via de la Plata across Spain, as well as St. Olav's Way across Norway. He was the first American to hike the 1150-mile Via Francigena from England to Rome, and in 2006, he and a friend re-blazed the 2600-mile route of the First Crusades from France to Jerusalem on a walk for peace, naming it the Templar Trail.

Their adventure was chronicled in **Along the Templar Trail**, the 2009 Lowell Thomas Gold Award-winner for **Best Travel Book** (Society of American Travel Writers Foundation) and shortlisted for *ForeWord Magazine* **Book of the Year** (adventure/recreation). Other books in his travel adventure series include: **Dead Men Don't Leave Tips: Adventures X Africa** (2005); and **Yak Butter Blues** (2004, 2nd edition 2005), his debut book, which won an **IPPY Award**. A Spanish edition will be published in October 2010.

Wilson has been interviewed as an adventure travel expert by worldwide media, including:

- *The Joey Reynolds Show*, WOR (New York)
- *Talk Radio with Michael Dixon*, WGN (Chicago)
 - *MSNBC Travel with Christopher Elliott*
- *“Get Serious! with Tina Vindum”* (San Francisco)
 - *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*
 - *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*
 - ORF-TV (Austria)
 - *Nice Matin* (France)
 - CNS Rome (Italy)
 - *Gudbrandsdølen Gagningen* (Norway)
- *Balkan Bulgarian Television*, Sofia (Bulgaria)
 - *Glas Public Voice*, Belgrade (Serbia)
 - *Alanya TV Nightly News* (Turkey)

Life When Hell Freezes Over, his story about his year of purgatory spent living in the Arctic, appeared in **They Lived to Tell the Tale: True Stories of Adventure from the Legendary Explorers Club** (The Lyons Press/Globe Pequot, 2007). He was also honored to write the introduction to **On a Donkey's Back**, a collection of poetry and paintings by and about the lives of Nepalese porters, (Yileen Press, 2008).

His photos have won awards from *National Geographic Traveler* and *Islands* magazines. His 50-page photo essay on Spain's Via de la Plata was featured in **Naïve & Abroad: Spain, Limping**

600 Miles Through History by Marcus Wilder (2008).

A graduate of UNC-Chapel Hill and a member of the prestigious Explorers Club, he's been living in northern Italy in the Alpine Südtirol while working on this latest book.

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Early Praise for OVER THE TOP & BACK AGAIN: Hiking X the Alps:



“This is my favorite kind of adventure tale: Against all odds, in the face of health, weather, interpersonal, navigational and culinary issues, Brandon Wilson and his somewhat reluctant wife hike it because it’s there – or, it’s supposed to be. I laughed, I winced, and then I started checking to see when I was next scheduled to be anywhere near the Via Alpina.”

~ Kyle Wagner, travel editor, *The Denver Post*

“Brandon Wilson brings his considerable intellect and wry sense of humor to this epic adventure, and the result is brilliantly accessible and wonderfully subversive.”

~ Richard Bangs, adventurer/author of *Quest for the Sublime*, *PEAKS* and books that celebrate travel adventure

“Informative, entertaining, and original. Award-winning author Brandon Wilson is a pioneer in a groundbreaking genre of travel writing.”

~ Richard R. Blake, *Midwest Book Review*

“This lighthearted hiking narrative reflects the positives of such an experience: overcoming hardship, laughing at their inability to find trail blazes, Europe's apparent fear of switchbacks on trails ascending 1000-plus meters per col, and the bond and struggle with your trail partner. Another celebration of simply putting one foot in front of the other with everything you need on your back and faith in the trail ahead. ...Recommended for armchair travelers and anyone interested in hiking the Alps.”

~ *Library Journal*

“Marvelous account...told with a fine eye for detail and a keen sense of humor.”

~ Royal Robbins, legendary rock climbing pioneer

“Wilson is my favorite travel writer. His newest book: “Over the Top & Back Again: Hiking X the Alps” is his most exciting book yet! ...While reading the first few chapters, I found myself laughing at his humor every few pages... Difficult to put it down. Throughout there is a sense of suspense in this wild adventure. This is perfect for armchair travelers as well as those who aspire to hike the same trail.”

~ *Rebecca Review*, *Amazon Top 10 Reviewer*

“Loved Brandon’s humor, gutsiness and *joie de vivre*.”

~ Ron Strickland, founder of the Pacific Northwest National Scenic Trail and author of *Leave A Trail*

“Wilson is the *king of tell it like it is* travel writing! There are few writers that I have come across that admit their missteps and appreciate that readers really do want to know what happens on a long arduous trek, be it scary, life changing or just downright painful. You'll feel the chill from the sleet, steam from the shower and the aroma wafting from a well-earned meal as you trek along!”

~ Donna Coomer, *Between the Lines Reviews*

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OVER THE TOP & BACK AGAIN: Hiking X the Alps

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