

'PowerHiking' authors saw the light in Paris

Sam Whiting

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Carolyn Hansen, right, takes the pictures with a digital camera. Cathleen Peck measures the distances with a handheld GPS device. They both do the walking and the writing for their "PowerHiking" series of guidebooks. Hansen, 60, of Belvedere does the talking.

IMAGES



Liz Hafalla / The Chronicle

On definition: Power hiking is seeing everything you can see, doing as much as you can do, and getting good exercise. Cathy and I have been walking for years, doing hikes with women all over the world. We keep a pretty good pace, but we stop a lot, because we go to all art stores, museums, shops, restaurants, cafes. We actually shop in or eat in every place that we put in the books.

On inspiration: We were in Paris getting ready to go to the train dressed in our hiking clothes, backpacks. I wanted perfume, somebody else wanted a T-shirt, somebody else wanted a scarf. We were on the Rue de Rivoli going really fast to get it all done and Cathy turned around to me and said, "We're power hiking the Rue de Rivoli." We both came to a stop and said, "What a great idea for a book."

On qualification: We had no background in publishing. I am a former junior high and high school teacher in Marin County, at San Domenico School and Red Hill Middle School. Cathy, who lives in Novato, taught at Terra Linda High.

On catalog: There are three. "PowerHiking Paris" was the first one, in 2007. "PowerHiking San Francisco" came out last year. "PowerHiking London" just came out, in June. We have just finished the research for "PowerHiking New York," which will come out next year. Once we get New York out of the way, we're hoping to do Rome next spring.

On frustration: When we were doing research for the first book, in 2007, I found myself on a corner in Paris with the wind blowing, trying to manage a big fold-out map, a camera, sunglasses, reading glasses and an umbrella. It was key to the idea that we wanted a small manageable book with easy maps to follow, with the photographs on the same page as the description.

On format: The books are 6 by 6 inches, designed so they will fit in a backpack or a purse. It is printed on high-grade, heavy paper so that the book stands up. You can hold the book and the pages don't flop around.

On uniform: That depends on where we are. In Paris we were dressed nicely. One of our catches is that we try to wear comfortable, good-looking shoes so that we don't look

like American tourists in shorts and big white clunky tennis shoes. If you are going into a shop, which we do, if you don't look good, they're not going to pay any attention to you.

On price: "Paris" is \$19.95. "San Francisco" is \$24.95 because it's much fatter. We went a little bit crazy in writing that one. "London" is \$21.95. We have our own Web site, www.powerhiking.com. We have primarily sold to independent bookstores because we're an independent company ourselves.

On product: We are about to reprint "San Francisco" after selling close to 1,500 since last year. "Paris" we are going to reprint after the first of the year.

On calamity: Other than rain, no. We got rained on in London but not as soaked as we got in New York.

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