

Our adventure on the River to River Trail began on Saturday, May 26th, 2018. "We" are Two Bobs' Adventures. A father and son team that includes me, the father, and my then 14 year old son, Bob. Our plan was to hike the 160 miles of the R2R in 9 days. I had spent a great deal of time planning out the logistics of where we would stay each night, where we would get water, and what we would eat. We wanted to get an early start on the trail Saturday morning, so my wife drove us down from Albion, IL on Friday evening and we spent the night at Arrowhead Lodge. It is 4 miles south of Karbers Ridge Road and about 6 miles from Elizabethtown. We drove in to Elizabethtown, Illinois to eat at the fish restaurant on the river. It was a great way to start our hike. The fish was excellent and the cabin we stayed in was clean and comfortable.

Day 1-Saturday, May 26th 2018. Elizabethtown to Garden of the Gods. 22 miles.

We hit the trail right about 6:00 a.m. We were hoping to start while the temp was a bit cooler. The day started out about 70 degrees and got up to about 85. Our plan for the day was to hike from the Ohio River to Garden of the Gods backpacker parking lot. We carried our light day packs because my wife picked us up at Garden of the Gods at the end of the day. Our original plan had been to camp at Garden of the Gods. However, it was Memorial Day Weekend and we were afraid we wouldn't be able to get a spot. So, we decided to get picked up and spend another night at Arrowhead Lodge. We filled a small bottle with water from the Ohio River to carry with us to the Mississippi River. The first part of the trail is a nice easy road walk out of Elizabethtown. Soon after entering the woods, the climbing begins! I think this first day probably had more ups and downs than any other day on the trail! We only had one wet creek crossing at Hog Thief Creek just before Iron Furnace Road. We crossed barefoot and headed on. We broke for lunch at the Camp Cadiz road crossing, about 14 miles into our day. When we are hiking, we don't take many breaks. We stop to refill water and that is about it. We made sure and took at least half an hour at lunch each day. We would take off our shoes, air out our feet, and sit down for awhile. We did take a rest break at High Knob Campground. There is a small store with limited drinks and food. We took advantage of the air conditioning and got some Gatorade. There was another group of hikers in the store that knew who we were from our YouTube channel. It's always neat to meet fans! We ended the day at 22 miles at the Garden of the Gods backpacker parking lot around 2:30 p.m. My wife picked us up and we spent the night at Arrowhead Lodge.

This first day was kind of a mixed bag as far as trail conditions go. The first part of the trail all the way to the junction with the Battery Rock leg of the trail was pretty good. From the junction all the way to Garden of the Gods was pretty torn up from horse traffic. It was rather difficult to maneuver through all the mud. The trail was well blazed all day though. Another thing I need to mention are the ticks! This first day, both Bob and I wore shorts. We both picked 20 ticks off of us throughout the day. After that, we both wore pants treated with permethrin. We never got more than one or two a day for the entirety of the trip after that.

Day 2-Sunday, May 27th 2018. Garden of the Gods to Lusk Creek. 21 miles approx.

Since we had made such good time the first day, we didn't hit the trail until 7:00 a.m. on Sunday. The temp started out right around 70 but quickly climbed to the low 90's. We started out from the backpackers parking lot heading toward Herod. I almost made a bad mistake just as we were leaving the GOG wilderness. I used the bathroom before we got on the road and forgot my trekking poles. Luckily I didn't make it very far before I noticed. This started a rather long and boring road walk. There is a sign on the road past Herod for New Hope Hill. We jokingly called it No Hope Hill! It seemed like we were going all up hill. It was really hot out in the open on the road. We weaved back and forth trying to stay in the shade! Soon after entering the woods into the one horse gap area, we took a break near a creek so we could refill our water. We were using a variety of maps on our hike. We really relied on Scott Graham's maps on rivertorivertrailhike.com to find water sources. We also used the Avenza Maps app to tell where we were. We decided to head through the one horse gap to get up a little higher hoping for a breeze while we ate our lunch. The trail leading through the gap was a mess! It was nothing but mid shin deep mud! We should have turned around, but we made it. We also stopped to admire the view from Rocky Top. The afternoon of this day was miserable. It was so hot and humid as to be almost unbearable. Sometime during the afternoon Bob twisted his ankle. I really thought we might have to call my wife to come get him. Having a twisted ankle on top of already being miserable almost put an end to his hike. Just before the trail comes out at Concord Cemetery we stopped at a creek to refill our water again. We drank a lot of water this day. As we came out onto the road, it began to thunder and get really dark. Right when we got to Bethesda Church it started pouring. We took shelter up against the side of the church for about an hour before the rain quit and the sun came out to make it even more humid. We had another wet creek crossing just before we set up camp for the night where we had planned along Lusk Creek. I burned my finger and got a nice blister while making supper. Bob's ankle was still hurting and we were both miserably hot. I told him to wait until morning before deciding if he wanted to quit. We had eaten and were settled in the tent by 8:00 p.m. Somewhere around 21 miles for the day.

Trail conditions on this day were a mixed bag also. The first part through GOG wasn't too bad. The one horse gap area was pretty torn up and could be easy to get on the wrong trail due to all the horse trails in the area. The trail in Lusk Creek wasn't too bad either. Even with all the rain. We did not have any cell signal at this camp.

Day 3-Monday, May 28th 2018. Memorial Day. Lusk Creek to Millstone Lake. 21 miles approx.

The morning always brings a new outlook. Bob felt a lot better and decided he wanted to keep going. The temp once again started out about 70 and topped out in the low 90's and very humid. We got on trail about 8:00 a.m. We had been warned that there were some tricky turns in the Lusk Creek area. I knew where the problem areas were supposed to be and using Avenza we didn't have any trouble. We took our first break of the day at Owl Bluff. It is a really scenic overlook and a great place to rest. Just after Owl Bluff, there was a pretty deep creek crossing. We decided to just walk across it and hope our feet dried out as we walked. The road

walk coming out of Lusk Creek heading into Eddyville was a real drag. It just seems to go on longer than what it really is. Once again, there is no shade on the road. We ended up stopping at the Shawnee Lounge in Eddyville for lunch. Unfortunately it was closed due to Memorial Day. We had food packed for lunch in case it was closed. We just sat up against the building and dried our shoes and socks in the sun while we ate lunch. After lunch we headed out of Eddyville into the Hayes Creek, Jackson Hole area. This is a beautiful area, but the trail was absolutely terrible! It was nothing but churned up horse mud. The section of trail from Petticoat Junction all the way to Millstone Lake was the worst. It was pretty much unhikeable in some areas. There were a lot of washed out areas full of water. Just before Millstone, Bob stepped in some mud and got his foot completely stuck. He couldn't get it free. I ended up using my trekking pole like a shovel and a lever. It took a good 5 minutes to free him. This entire time it had started to thunder again and we could tell the rain was getting close. We stopped at Bay Creek where the R2R used to cross to fill up our water for the night. We ended up setting up camp right on the shore of Millstone Lake. As soon as we got the tent set up, it started pouring once again. It rained most of the night. It rained so hard, that we weren't able to cook supper. Bob had skittles and a cliff bar. I had twizzlers and some chips.

The trail conditions as I've already mentioned were absolutely terrible this day. The Lusk Creek area wasn't bad and actually seem pretty good when compared with the second half of the day. It was just amazing how bad it was. We had section hiked this part before and it had not been bad at all. Once again, no cell service at this camp.

Day 4-Tuesday, May 29th 2018. Millstone Lake to Dutchman Lake. 21 miles.

We once again hit the trail about 8:00 a.m. Temps again around 70 starting out climbing to near 90. It was at this point that we started having foot problems. We hadn't had any blisters yet and we were really doing pretty well. However, we felt like we had a couple of hotspots that may develop into blisters. I had read online, always a bad way to start a sentence, that you could take leuko tape and wrap anywhere you felt you were getting a blister and it would prevent it. It worked! Sort of. It kept us from getting any blisters, but our feet were wet all day long. When we went to take the tape off that night, it took skin also. So, instead of blisters, I had a couple of holes on the bottom of my feet! Right from the start on day 4 the grass was soaked from the rain the night before. This got our feet wet right off and they didn't dry out all day. I still wonder if we would have been better off wearing waterproof boots or shoes. We both wore Altra Lone Peak trail runners. We both love them but they don't keep your feet dry. We both also wore Wright Socks brand socks. They are double layer to help prevent blisters. I think being double layer they weren't able to dry out as well. From Millstone, we went through the tin whistle and headed toward Gum Springs Road. This section of the trail was pretty much just a stream. Miserable walking. We stopped near Gum Springs Road to refill our water. From Gum Springs Road, the trail climbs very steeply to the top of the hill. It's hard walking, but I always enjoy that area. Once the trail came out on Garfield Lane, the road was a nice change from the trail. By the time we got back into the woods off Hilltop Lane we decided the road walking was worse. We stopped once again at Max Creek to refill water. We stopped at the trailhead parking area on Taylor Ridge Road to have lunch and try to dry our feet. It felt really

good to hit Goddard Crossing and know we were half way there! The trail got a little better for awhile. Then, just before we got to Bowmans Bottoms Road, thunder again! As soon as we hit the road, a downpour! This was the first time we had to stop and put on our rain gear. We stopped under Interstate 24 to wait out the storm. After about half an hour, it stopped and we made our way to Dutchman Lake. The sun came out and we were able to make supper! It was really nice to have a hot supper. In the tent and relaxing by 7:30 p.m.

Trail conditions for this part were pretty bad too. Millstone to Gum Springs was horrible. Gum Springs to Garfield Lane was not bad at all. The road walking was pretty tough. There is a really long climb. Max Creek area wasn't too bad. More road walking and then got bad again in the Bowmans Bottoms area and leading into Dutchman Lake. The trail from the road to Dutchman lake was pretty much just ankle deep water. We did have cell service at this camp.

Day 5-Wednesday, May 30th 2018. Dutchman Lake to Ferne Clyffe State Park. 7 miles.

This was our short day. Hot once again. Low about 75 and highs in the upper 80's. Super Humid. Lots of rain. On trail by 8:00 a.m. As soon as we got everything in our packs, storming again. The worst part is that it was still really hot even in the rain and we were wearing rain suits. It was like a sauna suit. One of the neatest parts of the trail is leaving Dutchman Lake. The trail goes through a pine forest. It's beautiful, but a storm had knocked down a lot of the trees since the last time we had been there. The trail becomes pretty much non existent in this area. We knew where to go, but there are so many trees down that it's hard going. After that, it is all road walking to Ferne Clyffe. It rained hard the entire time and finally quit about the time we made it to the backpacker campground. My wife met us there with our resupply. We both took a shower and then headed in to Maion IL for some real food. We also went to a laundromat to try and dry out our shoes. While we were doing this, I also spread out our tent and rainfly to dry them out. After a shower, dry shoes, and some real food we felt much better. The only problem the rest of the night was a raccoon took my Gatorade Bottle at camp. I got it back though! This is the day our overall plan changed also. Originally we had planned on camping at the Cedar Lake spillway on day 7 and camping in the Hutchins Creek area on day 8 and then finishing on day 9. We decided to camp at Cedar Lake on day 7 and then hiking all the way to the end on day 8. That was our new plan. We stayed in the tent camping area at Ferne Clyffe. Our plan was to hike into Panther Den the next day or possibly as far as the touch of nature wigwam and camp.

Day 6-Thursday, May 31st 2018. Ferne Clyffe State Park to Giant City State Park. 27 miles.

On the trail at 8:00 a.m. Temp 70. High in upper 80's 80-90% humidity. Rain! The trail through Ferne Clyffe is really good. There are some big climbs, but there are some really good views. The trail comes out on Happy Hollow Road and there is a good bit of road walking. Just before we got to the next trailhead on Happy Hollow Road, rain again. It got really dark and rained really hard. Our newly dry shoes were now already soaked again. We stopped at Buck Branch Creek to fill up on water. Even in the pouring rain it was so hot! We stopped at an abandoned gas station just past Interstate 57 for lunch. There was a big awning we were able

to sit under and stay dry. We took off shoes and socks for a breather, but it didn't help much. We had a long road walk into Panther Den Wilderness. This is where the trail got truly bad again. It had quit raining by this point, but it had rained so much that the trail was a stream. Most of the way through Panther Den was walking in water. We got to Panther Den in really good time due to all the road walking so we decided to push on. In the Crab Orchard Wilderness, the trail got better but there were a lot of trees down on the trail. As we crossed Rocky Comfort Road it was still only about 3:00 p.m. I told Bob that if he wanted to try it we could push on to Giant City State Park. I told him that if we did, we would be able to get breakfast at the lodge the next morning. That was all it took! The trail was really bad in this area. Completely covered in water again. We made it to Giant City and got our tent set up. Our plan was to then take a shower in the bath house and cook supper. You guessed it! Severe thunderstorms and tornado warnings in the area. Our shoes and socks would not dry out this night. Once again no hot supper. Cliff bars and beef sticks. This was the worst storm of the trip. I woke up at 2:00 a.m. due to headlights flooding our tent. A young couple had just pulled in and was attempting to set up camp! After much loud fighting and arguing I thought they would go to sleep. Instead, they started chopping wood and built a raging campfire. Then the drinking and laughing started. It was a long night after a long day.

Day 7-Friday, June 1st 2018. Giant City State Park to Cedar Lake Spillway. 13 miles.

We woke up to bright sunshine and 70. Highs in the upper 80's with super high humidity. All of our hiking clothes were still soaked. It was no fun putting on wet, clammy, stinky clothes. We got on the trail a little earlier so we could stop at the Giant City Lodge for breakfast. Bob was really wanting some orange juice. As we approached the lodge, a man came out and introduced himself. He and his wife had been following our hike on Facebook and wanted to buy us breakfast! Talk about trail magic! We had a great time visiting with them and had a great breakfast. Giant City is the only place on the entire trail where we took a wrong turn. It was somewhere after the lodge but before Makanda. We didn't go very far before I thought it didn't feel right and checked my map. Not sure how it happened. There were also several trees down from the storms the night before. We stopped in Makanda for a break and snack. Makanda is a really cool little town. They even have a sign that says no parking except for Bob! We got to talk to several locals who were very interesting. Leaving Makanda, it was getting very hot. There is another rather long road walk to get to the Lirley Trailhead before Cedar Lake. We rested at the trailhead and had lunch. From Lirley Trailhead to Cedar Lake is only about 4 miles, but I struggled. There were a lot of fresh blowdowns in this area too. I'm not sure why I felt so bad, but Bob had to do most of the camp chores this night. I was just drained. I felt like maybe I was kind of dehydrated and overheated. Cedar Lake is a beautiful place. We had a great camping spot and Bob was able to play with some other boys out on the spillway. We were also able to spread out our clothes and shoes on the rocks and finally get them dry! We were also able to have another hot meal. We had some extra time to play cards and still call it an early night.

Day 8-Saturday, June 2nd 2018. Cedar Lake Spillway to Devil's Backbone Park. 25 miles.

We got up just before sunrise on our last day. It was already 70, but really foggy. We got on the trail in good time and headed out. Our dry shoes didn't last very long. There was so much fog and dew on all the grass that we were soon wet again. It was really neat walking into Alto Pass in the fog. The trail sign in Alto Pass said Grand Tower 21 miles. It seemed like a really long way. There is a long road walk to the Godwin East Trailhead. Luckily this time it was still really foggy and relatively cool. The first part of the hike in the Bald Knob Wilderness was really good. Not too hot and a good trail. We stopped at Hutchins Creek to refill our water. It was a little tricky to pick the trail back up on the other side of the creek. The trail in the Clear Springs Wilderness area was really grown up. We got in to a bunch of stinging nettles. A couple of mile from the west trailhead we met up with a good friend of ours, Hiking with Shawn. He came out to hike with us part of the way to keep us going. He also brought chocolate chip cookies! We broke for lunch at the Godwin West trailhead. We also took a side trip out to Inspiration Point with Shawn. It is well worth the little bit of extra mileage to see that view. From that point on, it is all road walking. It didn't take long for the gravel to really start hurting our feet. You seem to feel every single rock! Just about the time we hit the levee, the sun came out. It was a miserable death march! There is absolutely no shade. Temps were in the low 90's and high humidity. It really did seem to go on forever. We finally made it to Grand Tower and headed to Devil's Backbone. Just before we got there, Bob got really overheated. He had to lay in the shade for about 30 minutes and drink a lot of water before I would let him go on. We finally made it! My wife and Shawn were both waiting for us along with some other people who had been following us on social media. We dumped our bottle of water into the Mississippi River and it was done! The people at Devil's Backbone park let us take showers in their bath house. That felt so good! Those last miles on the road did a number on our feet. I had some huge blisters on both feet. It was the first time I got blisters on the entire hike.

Conclusion:

When I look back on our trip, I think,"Was it fun?" Not really. Am I glad we did it? Absolutely! I'm proud of what we accomplished. Especially for a 14 year old boy. We had some really good times and a lot of really bad times too. I think it would be a better trip if you were able to have more days to complete it. I only had one week off of work. We had to get it done in that time frame. It would be a lot more "fun" if you could take your time and enjoy it. I hope you enjoyed reading this and hope it helps with your own thru hike.

Two Bobs' Adventures