

MY FIRST THRU HIKE MARCH 2017.

- *My first thru Hike March 2017.*

First Thru hike...solo.

Day1



My first Thru hike attempt. I was thinking about making the solo for a long time, but after an unusually warm first couple of months, I looked at the 10 day forecast on the Weather channel and it seemed like the perfect time.

I was going to have to go on a Sunday afternoon. I figured about 10 days. The 10 day forecast had changed to show rain that night and the next day. As I have said before, you pick the days, but the weather you just roll the dice.

On the way down I changed the plans. I was going to start at Elizabethtown, but as my wife was driving and I didn't have to leave the car, I chose to go to Battery Rock. I have traveled both legs. I just was thinking about doing that first leg in rain.

Battery Rock leg is about 5 miles longer, but with more road and ridge hiking than

the dirt trail at Elizabethtown.

We stopped at the trailhead, went down to battery Rock...sort of. The Ohio was up and flooded, so I got as close as possible. Then we headed to the car, I kissed my wife and she left and I headed off. It was country road walking all the way to Lamb, then up and West through those nice woods on an old forest road to the Quail habitat, and back on the black top to RT 1 and Mount Zion church. West from there and past the radio towers.

I started Hiking about 4pm, and it was already getting dark. I was heading toward the last bit of Davis road, but I don't hike after Dark, and I wasn't going to make the woods . There was a woods on the left side, on the edge of a field, so I made do. It Rained that night but not too hard and it let up before sunrise. I was long gone as soon as it started getting light enough to see. About 12 hours of night will do that. I don't build fires myself. I eat cold. I'd never leave a mark on private land anyway.

Day2





About the time I re entered the woods it started to rain again and it rained the rest of the day. It was warm enough though. I took a break from the rain and changed my shirt at the vault toilet at Camp Cadiz. Filled up my water bottles (at the spigot) and headed out again. I had a rain coat on that was more resistant than waterproof, and it leaked around my arms. My body stayed dry. I just took a couple of photos that day.

Somewhere north of the Junction with the E'town leg I got reception on my phone and had my wife call High Knob campground and see if JoJo had a place to stay. Turns out they weren't open yet, but she would let me stay in the "cowboy Hotel". She charged a tiny amount and I was able to use the shower house and her washer and dryer to dry out my totally soaked cloths and sleeping bag. I carry trash bags now for both. My packs rainfly didn't quite seal around the bottom and it all soaked from the bottom up.

Day 3





It rained hard all night with thunderstorms. JoJo said 2 ½" in the rain gauge. My wife said the rain was supposed to stop at 9 am. At 9am it was still raining hard. At 9:15 it was done for good. Pretty close.

I set off up to high knob for a morning photo. Was pretty drab though. Naturally the sun waited until I got back to the cabin. I left a tip and headed off. The high was in the 70's, what a great day for March. I passed by Garden of the Gods and the great

fire rings and overlook and didn't think I'd make the woods and campsite past Herod. It was getting late, so at the last bluff before Herod I found a way up. (left side a steep ramp) and got up on a great spot just big enough for a tent on mossy flat ground with a great view.

Day 4





Heading out in the morning, Herod, One Horse Gap, Concord Cemetery and a big fat hamburger and crispy fries at Eddyville tonight! Water was up at the crossing past Herod, nothing past knee high. The road from the south to Concord Cemetery was hard walking as usual with all those 6" roller rocks. The first Lusk Creek crossing West of Bethesda Church was an obstacle, but the second one with the big intersection was a headscratcher. The 2 choices were downstream to shallower rocks or a big tree down in the water. I chose the tree trunk, and my stick barely touched bottom leaning too far over, but I made it to shallower knee deep water and survived. I'd go downstream next time.

Then I got to the new reroute East of Owls bluff. And it sent me on some God forsaken trail that nothing had traveled since the 60's and parts were more swamp than trail. There were so many trees down on it I spent more time off the trail going around stuff than on it. It led to another trail closed sign with 001 not even mentioned, then another until I realized I was nearly to Natural Bridge, and the top of some bluff no one has ever set foot on. Bushwhacked my way to Guest crossing, and finally to Bowed tree Crossing where I would have been hours before if I had ignored the sign.

Turns out they pulled down the R2R blazes a couple months before they blazed the new trail. Smart.

I had been making great time on P.O'd adrenaline and got to Shawnee mart at about 7:00 when I thought they were closed. Whoo Hoo they were open and they stayed open until 8pm! Got my burger, fries and Pepsi!

It was long past dark when I left, so I wandered to the south to the community building and set up in one of the barn stalls out of sight. Don't know if it's ok, but I've stayed there twice now.

Day 5





I was going to stock up some at Shawneemart. I saw they were open on my way to the community center, but I figured they would be open early.

They weren't and I waited until 7, maybe later and they have very few items anymore. Did get some breakfast stuff and headed off to adventure.

I was in need of some personal unstinking and there was a great spot just off the trail with a natural bathtub. I hadn't seen anyone, the day was the last warm day, as the Weather channel had decided instead of highs in the upper '60- mid 70's it was going to turn to March again, and the warm days were going to go down to the upper '50's This was my chance to clean my dirt caked pants and wash up a bit.

So I washed up changed into my shorts for the last time and washed and got my pants to a cleaner looking filthy. At least the mud wouldn't weigh me down.

Just as I was standing on my pant legs twisting the water out, a couple came riding down the hill on their horses. Good thing they weren't 10 minutes earlier. I headed up the trail with my wet pants tied to the pack.

I passed by Millstone lake and was hoping to make Gum Springs Trailhead. I passed it with a lot of daylight yet and made it to a nice place up on a fire road on the west side of map 12. Rain forecast tonight. My pants were still about as wet as they were when I washed them . I hung them on a tree limb until the thunder storms rolled in and brought them in. The tent didn't leak except for a couple drops at the vents and morning came with clear skies. And about 38 degrees!

Day 6



So my pants are wet and 38 degrees. The only other thing I have is my cargo shorts I'm wearing. I can tell you from experience that wet cargo pants will fit over dry cargo shorts. After the first shock, I got used to them and after a couple of hours the pants were dry and I changed out of the shorts. I stopped in at Cedar Lake campground and got a soda and some nuts, but they weren't open for real yet either. I was going to get a \$4 shower there but plans had changed with the weather. The warmest thing I had to wear was my lined flannel shirt, and they were forecasting snow now and mid 20's for lows in the next couple of days so I was sunk. My wife was bringing a winter coat and wool hat, but My sleeping bag is really only good for mid 30's and not real good at that wearing pants & jacket. Well, my wife decided to take a couple of days off work and help me finish if I could get done by Sunday. That meant Dutchman lake today. I called her at 4:00 and told her to pick me up at the interstate overpass in an hour. I was trudging up RT45 to Goddards crossing at the time. I decided I needed to pick up the trudge a bit because that was pretty far. I like the hike through that section except for the always grown up dam past Tunnel hill trail. At that time of year it was pretty well fallen down, so it was as good as it gets. I was making as good as time as I could checking things off the map as I went. The power line crossings and the gas line crossing, then the couch and around the

curve left on the country road, then the curve back west. It was like 5 till coming down that road. Starting to hear that interstate traffic. Over the last hill and there she was . We stayed at a cabin at the Golf Course in Makanda. Oh boy, soaking in a hot bath, and steak at the clubhouse for dinner. Doesn't get any better.

Day 7



It flurried overnight. We were up before the sun and she dropped me off at the end of the road where she picked me up at. It was upper 30's that day with intermittent sprinkles. She left me with some huge Blue mittens. They went in my pockets as soon as she was out of sight. I was traveling lighter. I left the tent, the ground mat and the sleeping bag. Purists be hanged.

I hiked past Dutchman Lake then up the hill to the most beautiful moment ever on the trail. I climbed the hill to the pines on the ridge at the end of Twinz lane.

The sun came out while I came up the hill and entering the woods consisting of straight rows of tall old pines was near magical. They were tall enough and close enough that the lower branches were gone and you could see all the way up to the top branches everywhere, and there were sparkles of snow blowing down from last

nights flurries and the trees were creaking and sighing in the breeze that had begun to blow.

This was before the next Springs wind damage that messed up a big part of the middle but it's still a wonderful place. Then up the never ending hill that is tall Trees Lane, and then finally after RT37's narrow shoulder Rebman lane to Ferne Clyffe. I would have sworn the trail in Ferne Clyffe takes you back and forth all over the park to show you both sides of every tree. Ok, the Arch about halfway through is pretty cool. After coming out the top and hiking down Goreville road, I was on track to make it through the woods to Borks falls and up Regent road, only I couldn't find the new trailhead! (new to me. The other time I hiked it by the old guide and went up Martin Cave Lane instead of continuing on Happy Hollow. (and made it through) I walked up and down Happy hollow all the way to the curve where the road changes names, and called my wife in defeat. Turns out the trailhead was right around the corner. I had to make it up the next day and make it to Giant City Lodge or I'd not make it to the end this try.

Day 8





Today is the last dry day, cool but sunny. It is supposed to get down to lower 20's tonight, light snow. Some light rain later today possible. She drops me off at the trailhead and off I go. Didn't have time to visit Borks Falls, but I got a good photo from the top. Lots of road walking after that all the way to wayside. My wife met me as I had just gone over the Interstate on Goreville road with hot coffee and candy bars. She asked which I wanted, milkyway or snickers? Why choose I said and took

one of each.

I had to get moving as soon as I was finished. She was going shopping in Carbondale, and I had to make Giant City Lodge. The day was fairly uneventful, but there were a lot of pretty sites. Unfortunately my film card got full and I didn't notice until late in the day and I swapped in an empty one. As it was getting dusk and I was crossing the last bigger creek, I ran into the Giant City welcome committee consisting of a fairly unhappy to see me opossum. I steered around him and made it to the lodge at dusk. I took a quick change of shirt and pants in the car and washed under my arms with pumice "Fast Orange" hand soap. Don't ever do that, it stings, and is gritty, but at least I smelled like oranges. Then on to the all you can eat chicken dinner.

Day 9





Snow! It snowed a light snow overnight, and it kept going until the afternoon. Giant City is beautiful normally, but it was cool looking in the snow. I came out at Makanda and had a snack at the Gazebo then onto Lirley Trailhead. The hills looked great in the snow but the mid afternoon it started to plop down from the trees.

A little before Cedar Lake, I saw a recent set of boot prints heading the same way. They had stepped in the snow plops on the trail so they weren't that far ahead, but I never caught up all the way to Alto Pass, and never saw the person. I had a cheap camo boonie hat that I was hoping was water proof. I actually wore it over my stocking cap to keep it dry from the snow plops that kept landing on my head. Not only wasn't it waterproof, but it wasn't colorfast. It kept dripping green drips. There was \$2 wasted.

Alto Pass wasn't good enough. I'd walked the Godwin trailhead to Devils Backbone before with Swede, and I knew I needed to get there, so I had another 3 miles to do. I was pretty pooped out and was having to stop and pop my back on a flat surface from time to time but I got there before dark. I should mention I was living like a King at the cabin, My wife always had food at the lodge ready, or we went to the club house and we had bacon, eggs, toast and milk for breakfast. I was looking forward to the hot bath for sure and that night I think we went to the clubhouse and had pizza.

Day 10





Up before the sun again and a ride to the trailhead. I really like Godwin trail and it was great with some snow and leaf off on the ridge. I think my waterproof Wolverine boots actually stayed dry that day. They were always wet after about 15 minutes of rain, but as cold as it was outside, my feet were always comfortable and aside from feeling them squish constantly, I had no foot problems on this trip. The trip to pine hills was uneventful and I got to pine Hills road about 11:30 and had

lunch. I think it was the day before leftover steak.

On the way down I pulled a muscle in one of my calves on the steep decent, but once I got down to the flat levee road, it never bothered me again and wasn't a factor. It was spitting snow off and on and very cold. I think I actually wore the blue mittens. My wife caught up to me again with more hot coffee and candy bars. The levee road is relentless trudging. I'd have her drive ahead a couple of miles so I could see how far 2 miles were.

It's something like 11 miles from The end of Godwin trail west trailhead to the river at Devils Backbone, but it looks a lot closer from the top of the bluff. About 4:00 I got to the place where the road turns off the levee into town. It had started snowing for real about a half hour before when this dark cloud to the North finally got to us. Naturally I was headed north and I had to keep looking down to keep it out of my eyes, but after all this I wasn't letting mere weather stop me. About 4:30 I made it to the Mississippi! It was really coming down hard. You could barely see Grand tower. My wife got out of the car, hurried down to get a picture (somewhere) of me with my toe in the river and we hurried back to the car and she drove home while I rested. And that was my first thru trip.