

Through Hike of the River to River Trail

September 26 through October 9, 2025

Preparation

I first felt the urge to hike the R2R in the winter of 2023/2024. Not being an experienced backpacker, I started watching and reading a lot of content on the Internet to learn about what I needed to know. I weighed everything to the gram. I used a spreadsheet to help me decide what needed to be replaced with lighter gear, what needed added, and what needed to be left behind. In the summer of 2024, I started doing 2 day section hikes, culminating in a 4 day section from Eddyville to Elizabethtown. Each hike toughened me up a bit and reinforced how important it is to keep the pack weight down as much as possible. In the spring of 2025, I started doing as many day hikes as my busy life allowed for. By the end of the summer, I felt that I was ready.

A Day on the Trail

I did not keep a daily journal or take many photos. The reason for this was to keep my weight down and to conserve electricity for my GPS and phone. The following vignette is a conglomeration of memories which I hope gives a sense of the overall experience.

I look out of my tent at the sky as I've done several times over the night. I see its color has changed from moonlight blue and started to take on warmer tones of morning. When it's light enough to see, I get dressed. I put on my sweater that served as my pillow, stuff my sleeping bag into its pouch, then get out of the tent to start packing. Taking one last look around to make sure I got all my stuff, I start walking, sorely and slowly, as the sun first peeks above the horizon. It doesn't take long for my body to warm up so I stuff my sweater away, eat a piece of beef jerky and tortilla for breakfast, then continue with more ease as my feet settle into the pace.

The coolness of the morning has succumbed to the heat of mid-day. My breath is heavy and regular, keeping time with the clicks of my trekking poles. My shirt is soaked with sweat. My pants are wet from sweat. My socks are squishing in my shoes. A few pestering flies that don't care about bug spray dive bomb my ears, looking for moisture. I find a spot with a boulder to sit

on and remove my shoes and socks to un-prune my toes and air out my blisters. After eating and drinking a bit, I put on my last pair of dry socks and continue forward. Finding a stream, I refill my water then rinse out the socks that have become crusty with dirt and body salt. I strap the wet socks to my bag and plod ahead, up a hill, being mindful of snakes and loose footing.

The trail is pretty well marked. Most intersections and creek crossings have blazes to show the way, but in the deep woods it's sometimes hard to follow. The path winds between the trees and can be seen as a subtle depression in the ground where many feet have traveled. Fall leaves obscure the way, making the path disappear even 20 feet ahead. Sometimes the trail is through old pine forests, where the ground is soft and quiet. Moving through areas of maple and elm, the thick covering sounds not unlike a gentle breaking surf as my feet swish along. Moving into oak and hickory territory, the leaves become crunchy and loud. I keep my eyes mostly on the trail, ever looking for rocks, roots, ruts, holes, and snakes.

Water is always on my mind and I'm down to a half liter. Checking the maps, I see possible sources, but none are a sure thing after this drought we've had. I pass across a rocky stream bed that had flowing water last year but is bone dry today. I come upon another stream that has pools, but no flow. Swiping away the oily film and leaves from the water's surface, I use a cup to fill my water bladder. With the bladder hanging from a suitable tree, the filter is attached to the hose that hangs from the bottom, and once primed, a slow stream of drinkable water fills my bottles. I mix up some hydration powder into one and drink as much as I can. I refill the bottle, pack up, and head out with a full belly and 2 liters of water to last until I find my next source.

With an aching back, I stop to stretch then lay on the cool gravel of a forest road to watch the tall trees sway in the breeze. When I get up, I can see a wet imprint of where my body had transferred some sweat to the dry ground. As the afternoon heat starts to relax, I extend my arm toward the sun and fold my fingers at a right angle to my arm. By aligning the sun with the top of my index finger, I know that about an hour will pass by the time the sun moves to where my pinky finger is. I measure hand widths between the sun and the horizon, estimating three hours to sunset. Time to start looking for camp. Ideally, I want to camp next to a water source, but that's not always a viable option. I check the map and see a stream a few miles away, in National Forest.

It's late afternoon now and though the sun hasn't set yet, the wooded canyon is dim as if it were dusk. Arriving at my site, I find a flat spot of ground big enough for my tent and high enough to not collect water on the off chance it rains. I boil some water, pour it into a pouch of dehydrated trail food, then set up my tent while the food is re-hydrating.

Leaning against a tree to massage my sore back, I eat and drink as I listen to the wildlife: coyotes yipping not so far away, squirrels dropping nuts from the trees, deer shrieking to warn others of my presence, birds coming in to roost for the night, frogs chirping at the rising moon, and numerous other sounds from various critters going about their lives.

With a full belly, I retire to my tent, strip down, and air out. My sweater is folded under my head, and I resolve to do this at least one more day.

In My Bag

This table adds up to about 30 lbs. Note that only one day of food ration is listed here, but I carried enough food for 12 days, so my pack actually weighed 39 lbs.

Category	Item	Grams
camp	sleeping bag	2076
camp	1p tent	1100
camp	sleeping pad	320
camp	hygiene kit	175
camp	paracord	121
camp	t.p. in bag	91
camp	flashlight, head lamp	76
camp	ferro rod and mag block	49
camp	trowel for cathole	26
camp	mosquito net for head	23
camp	lighter, small bic	10
clothing	fleece pullover	421
clothing	3 extra pr hiking socks	255
clothing	25 l dry bag	166
clothing	synthetic tee	123
clothing	synthetic under shorts	109
eat	stove, JetBoil kit	405
eat	fuel, 100g JetBoil, small	200
eat	cloth napkin	53
eat	fork and spoon, plastic	23
eat ration for day	1 pouch dehydrated meal	180
eat ration for day	1 Gatorade protein bar	80
eat ration for day	1 portion beef jerky	55
eat ration for day	1 8" tortilla	45
eat ration for day	2 Liquid IV hydration powder packs	32
edc	cell phone	267

edc	flashlight, hand held	125
edc	wallet, minimal	17
edc	2" folding knife	15
hike	backpack	2310
hike	Poncho	255
hike	first aid	251
hike	4 oz picaridin bug spray	180
hydro	1 liter of water (1)	1000
hydro	1 liter of water (2)	1000
hydro	water filter kit	281
hydro	spare water filter	60
hydro	1 liter water bottle, empty	37
tech	battery bank and 2 cables	368
tech	garmin inReach	244
tech	solar charger, folding 8 panel, 25W	380