

So, You Want to Walk the KATY?

Perhaps you are a casual walker who has toyed with the idea of doing something bigger; perhaps walking a trail that seems too long to successfully complete, like the 237-mile KATY trail that extends almost across all of Missouri. If you need a bit of encouragement, read on.

When the KATY trail was born in the early 1990's, I remember thinking that it might be fun to someday attempt to walk and explore at least some of the trail. But being employed full-time, with a family of three active boys, I put that thought in the back of my mind for contemplation some other day.

Fast forward to 2016 when the idea again entered my thinking. Having retired four years earlier with now grown sons who had ventured out on their own, I had time to reconsider doing a project that had tempted me many years earlier.

I broached the subject with my family, who promptly replied “are you thinking of walking the whole thing?” I was now almost 70 and while I almost daily walked the neighborhood for a mile or so every day; walking even five miles in a stretch was not something I was sure I could sustain. My answer was “well, I don't think so, but it might be fun to do part of it.”

I live in Kansas City and the trail for me “begins” in Clinton, which is 55 miles away. There was also the matter of logistics: how do I get to the trail, where do I start, where do I end, are there places to stay, how far can I walk in a day, what will I need, what kind of footwear will I need and how long will it take? Like most people who begin to contemplate doing something like this I initially envisioned starting at one end of the trail and walking until I reached the other end. Lots of questions that gradually formed answers as I made the decision to walk at least a part of it and then worked out the answers as I proceeded. So, if you're contemplating walking all or part of the trail, perhaps you'll find some answers in the steps I took to eventually complete the entire trail.

First, the basics. While walking the trail sounded interesting, I had never even visited the trail, so I convinced my wife and oldest son to take a car ride with me and at least visit parts of the trail from Clinton to Sedalia, a stretch that I decided I would attempt first. Visiting the trailheads and parts of the trail in some of those towns in the early spring, we all found the trail to be what was advertised; generally flat with a small pebble rock base and, what looked to be lots of trees overhanging the walkway. Once the family visited the trail, they got interested and were happy to offer me assistance driving to and from the towns if I needed transportation both starting a section of trail and ending a section of trail, for I was beginning to decide that I would probably try walking a section a day and then returning another day to walk another section. While some people do walk the trail in one continuous walk, from beginning to end, I decided that would not be practical for me. Also, by visiting the trailheads and reading the information signs, I started to get an idea of the nominal



planned walk and then drive me to the beginning trailhead which meant that the bed-and-breakfast would be somewhere approximately in the middle. I found that the bed-and-breakfast owners are very gracious in doing this service and I always made arrangements at least a week in advance and paid them for their services. Also, a note is in order here. The trail is very busy during the summer and these places can fill up fast. The sooner you contact the owner about your proposed arrangements, the better chance you will have in obtaining both a room and a ride!

I began walking the trail on May 9th, 2017 and completed the walk on May 11th, 2018. The walk was actually split into two “legs”, with the first leg being completed the first year and the second leg being completed the second year. I completed the trail from Clinton to McKittrick (Hermann) in 2017 for my first leg and finished the second leg from McKittrick to St. Charles in 2018. The reason for this was that I tried to only walk during good weather; not too hot or not too cold. Some parts of the trail are not shaded and can be brutal in very hot weather. Also, the trails’ bathrooms are usually not open until April and closed in November. That’s important for a walker because there are no other restroom facilities on the trail and a 12-mile walk may take upwards of five hours. Also, the trail from McKittrick-to-St. Charles is closer to St. Louis and walking that section required a strategy that put me in the St. Louis area for the final push to finish.



In 2017 I walked 15 days, beginning in Clinton. I walked in May, June, September and October because the weather was mild. I also walked on July 31st because the weather that day was conducive for a walk. I tried to plan around rain and was largely successful, as I was only rained on during one walk, even though that day was supposed to be sunny. My last walk in 2017 was October 26th which as I mentioned, I wanted to see the fall foliage between Rocheport and McBaine which follows the bluffs along the Missouri River.

The following is how I accomplished the first “leg” of my walk:

Day 1: May 9 - Clinton to Calhoun (My sister dropped me off and my wife picked me up)

Day 2: May 15 – Windsor to Green Ridge (I drove to Windsor and parked at the trailhead; my oldest son met me at Green Ridge and drove me back to my car)

Day 3: May 31 – Sedalia to Green Ridge (I took Amtrak to Sedalia, hiked to the trailhead and my middle son picked me up at Green Ridge)

Day 4: June 7 – Sedalia to Clifton City (My brother-in-law offered a ride to Sedalia and picked me up at Clifton City as he was on a day car trip of his own in that area)

Day 5: June 20 – Calhoun to Windsor (My sister dropped me off and picked me up as she had business in Warrensburg)

Day 6: June 26 – Clifton City to Pilot Grove (I drove to the Booneville trailhead, was picked up by the owner of the Katy Junction B&B, who dropped me off at Clifton City)



Day 7: June 27 – Pilot Grove to Booneville (Spent the night at the B&B and walked back to my car at Booneville)

Day 8: July 31 – Rocheport to Booneville (I drove to the Booneville trailhead followed by my wife in her car. She drove me to Rocheport and I walked back to Booneville)

Day 9: September 13 – McKittrick to Portland (I drove to McKittrick, was picked up by the owner of the Doll House B&B and dropped off at Portland. I walked back to McKittrick, drove my car back to the B&B, spent the night and drove home the next day)

Day 10: September 29 – Portland to Tebbetts (I drove to Tebbetts, was again picked up by the owner of the Doll House B&B who dropped me off at Portland. In this case the owner did this service for me even though I was not staying at his B&B again!)

Day 11: October 3 – Tebbetts to Jefferson City (I drove to Jefferson City, was picked up by a former co-worker who lived there and who drove me to Tebbetts)

Day 12: October 11 – Hartsburg to Jefferson City (I drove to Jefferson City, was picked up by an old army buddy who lived there and who drove me to Hartsburg)



Day 13: October 12 – Easley to Hartsburg (After staying the night with my army buddy in Jefferson City, I drove to the Hartsburg trailhead followed by my army buddy who then drove me to Easley)

Day 14: October 25 – Easley to McBaine (My wife and I booked a B&B at Rocheport. She drove me to Easley and picked me up at McBaine. We spent the night at the B&B and went for a nice meal at a local winery)

Day 15: October 26 – Rocheport to McBaine (The Missouri Parks Department offers shuttle rides on the KATY trail at certain days of the year for non-walkers. This was one of those days. I walked from our B&B to McBaine and my wife took a later shuttle ride to McBaine. Both of us then rode the shuttle back to Rocheport)



McKittrick is about 71 miles from St. Charles. I calculated it would take about six days to complete, which I decided to do in continuous days of walking because we would be staying in the St. Louis area. So, in May of 2018 I enlisted the help of my wife to assist in my completion of the KATY trail walk. Luckily, we have family in the St. Louis area so we utilized this time to also visit them. We booked a motel in Chesterfield which became my wife's "home" for a few days while I finished the trail. For the last four days of my walk, she would drop me off and pick me up at the various trailheads.

This is how I completed the second "leg" of my walk:

Day 16: May 4 – Marthasville to Augusta (On Thursday, May 3rd I drove to Augusta and was picked up by the owner of the Little House B&B (no longer open) in Marthasville where I spent the night. The next day I walked to Augusta, picked up my car and then met my wife at the Amtrak station in Washington and we then spent the weekend at my son's home in the St. Louis area)



Day 17: - May 7 – Approximately MM-87.5 to McKittrick (My wife dropped me off at approximately this mile marker and I walked to McKittrick where we stayed at Joey's Bird House B&B)

Day 18: - May 8 – Approximately MM-87.5 to Marthasville (My wife dropped me off at approximately MM-87.5 and picked me up in Marthasville)

Day 19: - May 9 – Augusta to Weldon Springs (My wife dropped me off at Augusta and picked me up at Weldon Springs)

Day 20: - May 10 – Weldon Springs to Green Bottom (My wife dropped me off at Weldon Springs and picked me up at Green Bottom)

Day 21: - May 11 – Green Bottom to St. Charles (My wife dropped me off at Green Bottom and picked me up at St. Charles)

As you probably have discerned by now, I relied heavily on my family to help me accomplish this walk. However, I found that once I started this endeavor, they became solidly behind me and encouraged me to continue; for at times the endeavor seemed to become a “slog.” I am also very grateful to my Jefferson City friends for helping me out and to the B&B owners who went out of their way to assist me. I especially want to commend Jerry at the Katy Junction B&B in Pilot Grove who even dried my clothes after I got caught in the rain on my walk and Kenny and Missy Stevens, owners of the Doll House B&B in Rhineland who most graciously assisted me twice in picking me up at one trailhead and dropping me off at another.



Finally, there are some other things that probably should be pointed out.

1. **Shade:** The trail is generally shady but there are some long stretches that are not. The Clinton to Calhoun stretch is one of them and parts of it also parallel Highway 52.
2. **Trail:** The trail is generally flat but there also are some long stretches that gradually incline.
3. **Noise:** No matter where you walk, there is always some man-made noise, such as airplanes, vehicles and (especially irritating) motorcycles. Even the most remote part of the trail from Rocheport to Jefferson City is not immune.
4. **Internet:** Most of the trail has Internet access, which is handy as I could usually find my location using Google maps. Probably the trail between Rocheport and Jefferson City has the least cellular accessibility because of its remoteness. I utilized Verizon and an Iphone-7+.



5. **Benches:** Benches are few on the trail unless you're close to a trailhead.



Generally, there are more benches on the trail closer to the larger towns like Sedalia. (Note: I discovered that a bridge works well in place of a bench when I stopped for my breaks.)

6. **Bathrooms:** As mentioned previously, there are no bathrooms on the trail except at trailheads and most of these are porta-potties.

7. **Bikers:** Bikers "own" the

trail and depending on where you are and what day of the week, you will see many more bikers than walkers. The exception are large towns where many locals walk (and run) the trails. Weekends are busiest. Generally, bikers are very friendly and helpful. More than once while I was taking a break, a biker would ask if I needed help. The trail from Clinton to Sedalia and Tebbetts to Portland also allows horses, but I didn't encounter any during my walk; probably because most of my walks were on weekdays.

8. **Missouri Parks Department:** (<https://mostateparks.com/park/katy-trail-state-park>) Before you go it is important that you familiarize yourself with the general guidelines laid out by the Missouri Parks Department. They have lots of good information regarding what to carry, etc. and they also give trail condition updates. They do not recommend walking by yourself but I did exactly that because I couldn't find a partner who met my schedule or have the time available. However, there was always someone in my family who knew where I was going to walk and the approximate time, I would complete my walk. Also, that is another reason to keep a cellphone handy.

9. **Seasons:** I walked both spring and fall and I discovered that I much preferred the spring because of the animal activity and the spring flowers. I enjoyed the fall colors but by then, many animal species are migrating and for most, the mating season is complete.



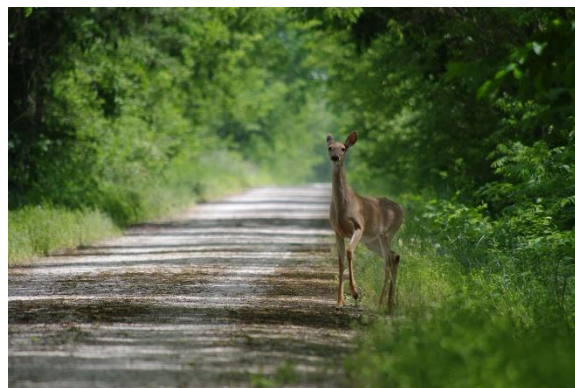
10. **Camera:** I love photography, especially animal and plant photography and there are numerous opportunities to photograph both. You never know what's around the corner. Just after I stopped to eat one day, a deer stepped onto the trail less than 50 yards away from me. Another time I found a four-foot copperhead snake sunning itself on the trail (I took a WIDE berth.) However, I later discovered when



looking at the pictures I took of him, that he had a snail attached to him, hitching a free ride!

11. **Backpack:** I carried a

backpack with minimal items to keep the weight down. I carried a KATY trail map, a first-aid kit, a whistle, a charging battery and cable, spare socks, a small towel, a backup camera battery, a snack and/or sandwich and enough water to last for the time I estimated that I would be on the trail. I also carried sunglasses and a visor which I normally wore. The small towel was useful for wiping off my face as I sweat. (Note: After hiking 12 miles with a backpack on, I gained a new appreciation for the Civil War soldiers who were asked to walk for 25 miles over uneven terrain with a full knapsack and then fight a battle!)



12. **Bugs:** When you're walking, you will be pestered by gnats as they are attracted by your sweat and fly directly in front of your face. Another reason sunglasses are essential! Also, occasionally large bees will fly around you and they make an



unmistakable buzzing sound. I just continued walking; they never landed on me and they usually left after a minute or so.

13. **Sedalia:** There is an oddity about the trail in Sedalia. The trail from Green Ridge to Sedalia ends at an excellent trailhead in downtown Sedalia. However, going on to Clifton City, the trail meanders through the city and then onto a road where it finally becomes the actual trail again. For

some reason I never found this out and when my brother-in-law dropped me off, it was at the location of original train track which I discovered, has not been converted. Nevertheless, I also walked this section for about a mile when I returned to the completed section of the trail.

14. **Bed & Breakfast facilities:** I stayed at four different B&B's during my walk and found most of them to be very pleasant and helpful. (The one exception is the now closed Little House B&B which was pleasant enough, but the owner only rented it out to one person at a time and breakfast was a laid-out assortment of cereals,



pastries, etc.) Dinner was always on-your-own, so I always made sure there was at least one restaurant somewhere easy to walk to, as well as the B&B itself. Unlike a biker, you're limited how far you can reasonably go and after a long hike; you really don't want to walk very far! Breakfast was always plentiful and as mentioned

before, the owners are really there for your assistance and comfort. (The owners would take my change of clothing with them to the B&B after dropping me off and would allow me to return and pick these items up after completing my walk the next day. This negated the need to put everything in my backpack.) The KATY trail website (<https://bikekatytrail.com/mileage-chart.aspx>) has excellent information about everything from mileage between trailheads to amenities at each trailhead.

15. **Odds & Ends:** If you're wondering, the final tally of the steps I took to complete the entire trail was around 450,000 steps. I kept a log on my phone of steps, number and approximate places of benches, the general condition of the trail I took that day (level, shady, uphill, etc.) and how shady or open it was and gave it a rating of 1-10. I also carried a SLR camera with a telephoto lens. I find this to be much better than a phone for close-up shots, although the new phones will capture most animals and plants very well.

