



Stories Along The KHT Corridor

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Knobstone Hiking Trail, Thru Hiked—Nov. 29 - Dec 12, 2024

After-Thanksgiving 2024 KHT Solo Thru-Hike Week #1

I visited my brother and his wife in Louisville for Thanksgiving, and I supplemented my visit with a two-week KHT hike from Deam Lake northbound. Even though I have been living in Norman, Oklahoma for almost 25 years and other places before that, we grew up in Floyds Knobs in Floyd County. I had already hiked the Knobstone Trail from Delaney Park south in November 2019, and I was interested in seeing the entire KHT. My brother warned me that weather reports were forecasting nighttime temperatures in the teens, but I had my 5-degree Western Mountaineering sleeping bag, a nice-but-a-bit-heavy REI tent, and plenty of clothes.

They let me off at the Deam Lake trailhead in early afternoon on Friday, November 29, and I hiked about 7.5 miles with the remaining daylight. I met several day hikers during the first 5 miles heading south back to the parking lot, and I noticed that the tornado damage that was so evident in 2019 was growing back with a myriad of saplings that were already taller than I am. The KT is very well maintained, although some of the steps that lead up and down the steep hills are getting old and coming out of the ground in places.

The night was clear and cold, as was Saturday morning, but clouds started moving in during the afternoon. I met a couple of lone hunters, and I talked with the second guy. He said he was just scouting around, but he had his rifle

in case he got lucky. I told him that I hadn't seen any deer, but I was pretty noisy with all the fallen leaves everywhere. After a few miles more, I carefully descended the big steep hill down to IN 160, and I noticed that there were no jugs of water cached on the hill as I had seen plenty of in 2019. After a few more miles, I camped on the trail very close to mile 22 and near the North Branch of Big Ox Creek. It was already snowing, which continued past midnight, but the temperature was less cold than the night before.

There were no hunters or anyone else on the trail on Sunday. I had to be very careful about slipping and sliding in the snow up and down the steep hills, so I only made it to mile 31.5. I was not very good about getting up early on this hike, so I didn't really get started most days until 9 AM or even 10 AM. What I did notice were a surprising number of pawprints of cats walking along the lengths of snow-covered fallen branches. I asked my brother if these were feral housecats or maybe bobcats. He leaned toward the bobcat hypothesis, claiming that southern Indiana was rife with them these days - even getting into residential neighborhoods.

Monday, I made it past mile 43 toward Spurgeon Hollow Lake near a creek where I could get water. The only people I saw were in vehicles on the roads, especially IN 56. Tuesday morning marked the end of the Knobstone Trail and the beginning of road walking on the Pioneer section - Rooster Hill Road, [IN 135](#), [Goat Hollow Road](#), and Haleysburg Road. I found the tombstone marker of donor names on the east side of Haleysburg Road, but I was unable to find the trail on the west side of the road through the Oak Heritage Conservancy. I therefore walked along Wheeler Hollow Road to Ault Sawmill Road, where I easily found the other end of the trail. It was getting dark, so I camped on the Conservancy land, which the KHT website deems acceptable.

On Wednesday, I walked to and along Buffalo Bottoms Road and Sparks Ferry Road to the old railroad bridge across the East Fork of the White River, which my brother said that he has canoed under. I sat down for a while in Sparksville Park to eat snacks and to shield myself from a fairly strong wind, which cleared the sky and brought temperatures up to about 50 degrees this one day.

I did find the KHT trail segment heading east out of Sparksville, but it was unmarked and unmaintained after the gate, so I turned back after just a little while. I got all kinds of hitchhikers on my clothes, and it was a pain to pull them off. I followed Sparksville Pike north to (Jackson) County Road (CR) 1200, passing bucolic fields with horses. CR 1200 soon turned to gravel and went down to cross Dry Creek. The creek was certainly not dry and the crossing was a messy ford, but a big FedEx truck whizzed by and navigated itself just fine. It was getting dark, so I walked west along the creek for a few tens of meters and camped a little bit away from the creek. This was a wooded area, so no one saw me.

Thursday morning was back to being cold and cloudy again. I walked past Hemlock Bluff Nature Preserve and continued north to Baseline Road. At this point I started trying to get an Uber ride to the Dollar General (DG) Store to the west on US 50, but no driver would answer, so I had to walk the 5 miles toward Bedford. On the way I came to the Plaza Motel, which I had seen on the map. It was old but quite nice, so I stayed there for \$56 plus tax. They had a boiler which kept the room toasty warm. No flimsy electric heat here, and the temperature was forecast to go down to 13 degrees, my coldest night on the trail. I was able to walk the remaining 1.2 miles to DG and back with no big pack, and I resupplied for most of a week for not much over \$50. At the motel I was able to recharge my cellphone and two own power banks conveniently.

After-Thanksgiving 2024 KHT Solo Thru-Hike, Week #2

Lazy me, I didn't get out of the Plaza Motel on US 50 until 10 AM on Friday, December 6, but it was pretty cold. I backtracked 5 miles east along US 50 and walked north and east along the KHT-prescribed county roads to the Pletzer Camp. On the way, there were horses in fields and a couple of homestead junkyards. I found the clearly blazed path from the camp through the woods, climbing over a couple of stiles to (Jackson) County Road (CR) 400, but I could not find the continuation of this trail north of CR 400. Therefore, I road walked the rest of the way to the Frank Fisher Barn, and I easily found the north end of the missing trail just south of the barn.

By this time, it was mid-afternoon and the sky was clear and bright. A warming trend was beginning that lasted a few days. I followed the Cristy Easement trail to its high point, then down into the former MOTO ATV area. This was the worst part of the entire KHT in terms of lack of maintenance and just poor trail location in bottomlands. I ripped my REI jacket on some briars, and the jacket started leaking insulation a little bit, which I was not able to stop because I had forgotten my repair tape. Finally, the trail headed up to the road, and I climbed over the fence using the very nice and new stile. Back on county roads, I walked north across IN 58 to the Hickory Ridge Trail system in the Hoosier National Forest. The first thing I noticed was that the sign at the entrance of the trail had been spattered with a healthy dose of buckshot. By this time it was getting dark, so I only hiked a couple hundred meters to a convenient camping location near a creek.

Saturday turned out to be my longest hiking day on the trail. I followed trails west and north and passed a couple of ladies riding horses. I remembered that stock animals have the right of way, so I gave them a wide berth. By afternoon I reached the Hickory Grove church and cemetery. There was a privy there, so I was able to do my business without having to dig a hole in the woods. There was also a sign admonishing horsemen to show some respect and keep their horses out of the cemetery.

Soon the trail reached its westernmost point, swung around toward the east, and climbed onto a ridge. As it got dark, I was hoping to find a low point and a water source, but that did not happen. I had to keep hiking with a headlamp all the way to CR 1190 near Maumee, whereupon I descended off road to the South Fork of the Salt Creek where I camped. The creek was non-flowing, evidently part of Lake Monroe, so I had to find a big stick to bash through an inch of ice in order to get to the water. I did not get into my sleeping bag until after 11 PM, and I found out the next morning that I was not supposed to have camped there because the land was associated with the lake and was not part of the national forest.

Sunday was the best weather day of my hike. I road walked a couple of miles to the south end of Nebo Ridge and followed the trail for the advertised 8.3 miles to Elkinsville Road. Skies were clear and bright, and a couple of not-so-

young mountain bikers whizzed past me toward the end. I crossed the Middle Fork of the Salt Creek, and once again I had to bash through the ice in order to fill my water bottles, although it turned out that I could have waited until Blue Creek, which was flowing and not ice-covered. I walked about 2 or 3 miles on Blue Creek Road to its end, which marked the start of Horse Trail D. This trail climbed onto another ridge on which I camped after a mile or so.

Finally, on Monday morning I reached the Tecumseh Trail. Strangely, the trail's terminus is not at the top of the ridge. Instead, I had to walk down off the ridge on an eroded trail with lots of little pink flags to Panther Creek. There I found a beat-up old "End of the Tecumseh Trail" sign and a nice, newer bench. The south end of the Tecumseh Trail appears to be the wild end, with some views, no other hikers, and no shelters. By mid-afternoon I crossed IN 46 and ended up camping on top of High King Hill, just south of Lake Yellowwood. Looking down through the trees, I saw one camper walking around with a headlight, but there were certainly no crowds of campers at this time of year. There was nice bench at the top of the hill, and it was a convenient place to cook and eat.

Tuesday started out as a misty morning, which shrouded the lake. I followed the trail along the west side of the lake and signed the trail register at the north end. The trail headed up hill and followed another long ridge, while the mist burned off, leaving mostly clear skies once again. After crossing Lanam Ridge Road, I eventually reached what Gaia calls Charlie's Shelter, which is fully enclosed and up on stilts. It was getting late, so I was going to have to skip my planned side trip to the Helmsburg General Store. I took a cheating shortcut across the railroad track, across IN 45, and a mile or two more, where I camped along the trail.

Wednesday was the last day of above-freezing temperatures and my last full day of hiking. I passed the Fox Den Lean-to, Bear Lake, the new Backcountry Shelter, and several nice bridges. This is the well-developed north end of the Tecumseh Trail. I met three Morgan-Monroe State Forest (MMSF) personnel putting in some new trail cameras near Low Gap Road, but I kept going until I reached the Rock Shelter. I had gotten the impression from Gaia that this

was just like the other shelters I had seen, but it finally occurred to me in the semi-darkness that this was just a rock overhang in the deep hollow. Camping underneath the overhang did keep me shielded from the little bit of snow that fell, but the temperatures once again went back down into the teens.

I made it to the MMSF office and visitor center by noon on Thursday, December 12 and this time I was able to get an Uber ride to Martinsburg. While I was waiting for my ride, I looked around the visitor center displays and found that I was not supposed to have camped at the Rock Shelter - that back-country camping was only allowed east of Low Gap Road. The attendant said that it was no problem, that no one was in the forest with these kinds of temperatures. My Uber soon arrived, and I bought a bus ticket on-line from the Martinsville McDonald's to Indianapolis, then to Louisville, where my brother picked me up at the bus station at 10 PM that evening.

Submitted by Kurt Bachmann Jan 7, 2025