

IOWA STATE PARK WALKS – 20 IN 2020: A synopsis
By Sherry Sayers

So, my crazy husband calls me with this crazy idea to buy a motorhome, take the cat, and drive to Iowa to walk 20 State Park walks in two weeks. I was not comfortable staying in that many motels with the Coronavirus still out there, so that is where the motorhome concept came from. As it turns out, it worked out perfectly, and I had a great time. All the parks were beautiful with woods, most with a lake, and great trails. I won't bore you with descriptions of every walk (as that could turn into a book!) but will do a synopsis of the whole trip.

We camped in several of the parks, then took the car to various parks close by for day trips. What surprised me about Iowa is all the cornfields (yes, I did get sick of them), then right across the road from the cornfields is this beautiful state park with hilly woods and a lake. Iowa does have some beautiful country. Here is the order of the parks we did: Waubonsie (camped there), Lake of 3 Fires, Lake Manawa, Lake Anita, Prairie Rose (camped there), Lewis & Clark, Stone (one of my favorites), Big Creek, Stephens State Forest (not my favorite), Ledges (hard, hard, hard), MacIntosh Woods, Pilot Knob, Beeds Lake (one of the prettiest with the spillway), Pikes Peak (the same guy as our Pikes Peak!), Volga River, Mines of Spain (hard, hard, hard), Lake MacBride, Lake Darling (camped there) and Geode. Now, if you are paying attention, you will notice this is only 19. That is because Palisades-Kepler was still closed due to a storm they had earlier in the year, but I made up that mileage by walking Mines of Spain. That walk was really hard with a lot of iron steps straight up the hill that went to a monument of the founder of Dubuque, Julien Dubuque, also founder of the Mines of Spain. Lots of history here.

Most of the parks were deserted (end of season), but Pikes Peak was crazy busy (well, it was the weekend), and it had a nice waterfall to hike to (lots of wooden steps). After hiking Pikes Peak, we stopped in the cutest little town called McGregor and they were having a fall festival in the city park, where we got bratwursts and hot apple cider, and I bought lots of homemade jam. Ledges also had many, many steps going down to the limestone bluffs, then back up. I wish I had counted them all, but I estimate at least 500. They were stone steps built right into the hill. While staying at Ledges, I also did a walk in Madrid on the high trestle bridge, which is 13 stories high and crosses the Des Moines River. The wind was brutal that day.

On the way to Lake MacBride, we stopped at Amana Colonies, which is an old German settlement from the mid-1800s. It was a religious communal society, much like the Amish. Now there are shops, restaurants, a woolen mill, and furniture and clock store with demonstrations of the old ways. Amana means "remain faithful." I also did a walk there and we got take-out of schnitzel sandwiches from the Millstream Brau Haus (a huge amount of food!). There was also a general store there that was so cool (more homemade jam!).

As it turned out, it took us 16 days to do 19 walks, plus two before we got to Iowa (Abilene and Leavenworth, Kansas for carousels, the two I already mentioned in Iowa, and one on the way home (St. Louis, border crossing). We had more walks planned to do on the way home, but by that point, I was ready to just get home and chill. So, I would summarize this trip to Iowa as beautiful parks and trails, lots of lakes, lots of stairs, and lots of cornfields. We had fantastic fall weather with low humidity almost every day. Kudos go to the Greater Des Moines Volkssport Association and the Nebraska Wander Freunde Trailblazers for all their hard work in organizing these walks and the great trail directions.

Stay tuned for my next adventure because it turns out that crazy husband mentioned above has decided to do a special program in Arizona walking all the county seats in 2021, and I must go and “critique” his trail directions. There are only 15 counties in Arizona, and he is doing nine of them, with three other clubs already having existing walks in the remaining county seats. Go to <https://azstrollers.org> for more details and to sign up. Also, go to <https://woodlandwanderers.com/friendship/lowaPictures.html> for lots of pictures of Iowa.