

Plenty of adventure so far for walker and her dog

Written by Elizabeth Barrett
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Maine native learns to trust universe on cross-country walk.

Thirty-year-old Kelly Wells wanted an adventure.

So she loaded camping gear and supplies into a baby jogger, fastened saddle bags on her dog, Anna, and the two headed west.

Wells left Hagarstown, MD, on May 20, and wants to make it to the Portland, OR, area by early October.

“I wanted to have an adventure and found one,” she said.

Last Sunday, happenstance meant a home-cooked meal and bed in the home of Kyle and Jerri Beyea and their two daughters.

Jerri was on her way to water a flower bed in E.G. West Park when a friend asked her to go to a garage sale.

When she returned to the park, she almost sprayed Wells with her hose. The trekker was headed downtown from a camp spot at Lafayette Park.

“We got to visiting,” Beyea said.

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“And I was invited to supper and stayed there last night,” Wells said.

Another motive for the cross-country journey was to prove to herself that the country and world was not as horrible as she said is portrayed in the media.

“I felt, in my heart, that people are good and our country and world are good,” Wells said.

After making the geographic halfway-between-the-coasts point outside of Grand Island last week, she said her theory has proven to be true.

She marked 1,300 miles in Gothenburg, noting that she’s worn out three pairs of shoes.

Wells camps or stays in homes if invited and has had no bad experiences although she steered clear of areas in Chicago and Omaha that she was told were dangerous.

Perhaps her biggest challenge is being alone for long periods of time. Wells normally walks from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. and tries to average about 20 miles a day.

“It gets to you sometimes at the end so I’ll chat with anyone who looks friendly,” she said.

Hot, humid weather laced with thunderstorms in Iowa stalled her journey for a week.

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“The heat index was 120 degrees,” Wells said, noting that the heat gets to Anna. “She can’t walk as far and slows down.”

Iowa has been her favorite state.

“There’s something about Iowa that charms you,” she said, noting that she met up with riders in the Register’s Annual Great Bike Ride Across Iowa and enjoyed camping with them.

The Cornhusker state is full of great people too, she said.

“In fact, the Midwest is very friendly,” she said.

Wells and Anna have accepted rides, over rivers without pedestrian bridges, and around dangerous areas in cities.

On Monday, which was

a “free” or non-walking day for Wells, Jerri gave her new friends a ride to North Platte where Wells had a reservation for a “couch” or a place to spend the night. She found the site on couchsurfing.org.

So far, Wells said she’s learned that people are decent and generous.

“If you talk to someone, they’re going to help you if you need it,” she said. “I think a lot of people keep their distance but if you make the step, they are more willing to help.”

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Wells said she tries to live in the moment because each day changes so much.

That was advice she received from a fellow she contacted who had trekked across the country.

“He said to never make plans because it takes away the enjoyment of letting life, and the universe, happen,” Wells said.

Not stressing over things that can't be changed is another lesson she's learned.

The Monmouth, MN, native pointed to the three flat tires she had upon arriving, staying and leaving Cozad.

“I got depressed until I arrived in Gothenburg and found out the Pony Express Station was open,” Wells said, noting that so many things along her journey have been poorly timed that her mother calls it “The Adventure of Poor Timing.”

For example, when Wells went to visit the world's largest cuckoo clock near Winesburg, OH, the attraction was closed for maintenance.

“You have to let the universe take care of you,” she said. “It will work out, not always perfectly.

“That's the sense of adventure. You let it happen and see where you end up.”

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