

Our Trip Takes Us

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By Becky Hirn

Imagine a fairytale forest where pine trees are so tall it's like they're racing each other to the sky. Looking up you can barely see the tops of the trees. Looking around you, you can't see anything but more tall trees. The thickness of the forest muffles all sound. A path before you leads deeper into the forest, but you have to stop, breathe it in, and commit it to memory.

This was my experience one morning in Minnesota when Dan and I got up before the kids and took a walk in the woods. The nearest town was Ely, MN. The campground was in Bearhead Lake State Park. But I wouldn't have been surprised if a medieval knight came riding down the path on a horse to give the king's command. My imagination must have been particularly active that morning because I also half-expected to encounter a bear that morning. We found out later that there were actually bears in the area. But I was pretty sure we were going to be eaten or mauled. Fortunately, there was no knight and no bear. I finally relaxed and took in the gift of the morning walk.

These walks have become one of our little indulgences. It all started in Vermont when we wanted to get up to see the sunrise over Lake Champlain. In the dark, before breakfast and even coffee, we hiked a little trail to the lake. It was too cloudy that morning, so it wasn't the picturesque scene we'd imagined the night before. It didn't matter though, because it was fun and still pretty and most importantly, it was the beginning of a tradition.

In Michigan, at Sleeping Bear Dunes National Park, we hiked a couple miles along a trail I think may have been a railroad. The path was wide and super straight. The woods were dense. We'd hoped to make it all the way to Lake Michigan. But either we got lost or misread the sign. Maybe it said 13 miles instead of 1.3 miles. It was still an unforgettable hike.

In Illinois, we walked the camping loops in the Mississippi Palisades State Park. The park was huge, and we were one of only a handful of campers there. There was a translucent mist all throughout the park. I guessed that it had to do with the climate and marshy surroundings in this Mississippi River region. A couple weeks later in Tennessee we walked along a little river in the Great Smoky Mountains. It was cool enough to see our breath. Again we were on the lookout for bears, but saw none.

In North Carolina this week, we've had some great opportunities for morning walks. We walked a couple miles by flashlight on the Outer Banks to watch the sun poke up through the Atlantic. Another morning in North Carolina while staying on a farm with family friends, we strolled the property and had the chance to see what the horses and goats were up to so early. Standing at the fence taking a picture of one of the horses, I was reminded of one of our favorite programs before we left, "Sunrise Earth," on the Discovery Channel. It really captured the quiet moments before the day begins, which is what our walks are all about.

We don't always stay in state parks and beautiful places. Sometimes it's just a big old parking lot. But when we do, Dan and I make that morning rendezvous with nature. All along we've snapped photos. I'm putting all those photos together in a collection called "Morning Walks." I'll share it at our website, www.ourtriptakesus.com/walks.

Becky Hirn is a Delphos resident traveling America with her family for a year. She documents the journey at www.ourtriptakesus.com. Follow the Hirn family in photos, blogs, on Facebook and Twitter. Or learn how to partner with the trip as an advertiser. You may e-mail Becky at beckyhirn@ourtriptakesus.com