

# Hiking 4700 Miles for Breast Cancer

By: Katee Rose

Aaron Landon, aka “Soda”, has been out on the trail since late March and is hoping to hike the 4700 miles of the North Country Trail. He left Lake Sakakawea State Park in North Dakota to begin this long journey on March 24<sup>th</sup>. He explains that he chose this day because it was his mother’s birthday, who he lost to a breast cancer battle 2 years ago. He is walking in memory of her and hoping to raise awareness and donations.

Landon was born in Rochester Minnesota. When he was 5 his family moved to England where he spent most of his childhood and in his teens returned to Rochester where he raised his own family. Aaron just turned 47 out on the trail back in April. The North Country Trail reaches all the way from North Dakota to Vermont.

Landon and I crossed paths last weekend in Finland, MN - 1050 miles into his journey. He says when he gets to around 2500 miles (around halfway) he will start looking for donations. “Once I show everyone I’m serious about this trail, that’s when I’ll start raising money,” he says.

He has a small internet presence, but mostly uses Facebook under his name Aaron Landon (Soda). Facebook, he says, is the best place to find all of his updates as he travels. Donations will be accepted through the platform as well.

When he first left for this journey, he was expecting to be able to make it to his final destination in Vermont by Oct. 31st, although he has experienced some setbacks. One of which landed him in the hospital for a week. He ended up with an abscess infection that prevented him from walking and had to have it drained. Another thing he didn’t account for that may have put him behind schedule was facing some harsh winter weather a few weeks back, but says regardless of how far he makes it, it’s about the experience and connections he makes along the way.

Before he found himself out on the trail he owned an arborist business with his father cutting down trees. “I did that for my family, I had a house, cars...my daughter is in college now. I woke up one morning wondering why I was waking up at 6 in the morning killing myself till 6 o’clock at night.” Once his daughter was off to college, he decided to switch it up and started off on the 1100 mile Florida hiking trail. He’s been passionate about these long walks in the woods ever since, going on 5 years now.

He has been working in an electrical utilities factory making electrical poles for the last few years. He says he is now a silent owner in the arborist business and enjoys working at the factory because he no longer has the business owner stress on his shoulders and can take off from the job for 4 months and come back to work whenever he likes. Everything that doesn’t fit in a 10x10 storage space down in Rochester he has sold off, including his house and car.

Landon says next spring he’ll be back in the area to work at Snowbank Lodge in the boundary waters. He passed through there a while back and they had offered him a job whenever he was done with the hike.

He hikes with the bare minimum. A tent, sleeping pad, cooking set up, and food. “What I do is every Sunday, I lay out all my stuff and if I haven’t touched it that week, I get rid of it”. His winter gear has been weighing in at around 27 lbs. of gear, although now with the coming summer months he will be switching out to his ultralight gear which will weigh in at around 15 pounds.

“It’s taken me many years to get to that point, I started out with a 3 person tent, it’s taken me years and many failures to narrow it down... You learn what you can live without,” Landon says. “I’m walking, I’m eating, and I’m sleeping, that’s all I’m doing.”

“Theres people that hike in order to camp,

and there’s people that camp to hike,” says Joe King, Aaron’s friend who has come to support him in taking his winter gear and switching out what he needs for the rest of the hike.

“In order to get 4,700 miles I can’t be so focused on scenic spots, but I also can’t forget about them either, I need to embrace them, I need to cherish them, but I also can’t lollygag and embrace myself with every beautiful spot that I come across because I do need to do 25-30 miles each day in order to get to Vermont before the snow flies,” Aaron says.

He recognizes that he has to remind himself once in a while to look back and take in the sights of where he’s been pushing through. He can really get caught up in the determination it takes to keep going and making miles. “I have to teach myself to slow down and to look back, because I can get so focused on grinding those miles... If I don’t finish this trail, it’s okay by me, as long as I am embracing these moments, if I was grinding, grinding, grinding, and then fail at this trail, then I would have a problem... The trail will always be there for me to come back to if I don’t finish it this time.” When he’s on the trail he says, “I don’t worry about anything else, I don’t worry about what’s going on in the world, I don’t have any news apps. It’s just those 3 things: where am I going to sleep, what am I going to eat, and how am I going to get from point A to point B”. He realizes it’s a form of addiction. Now



“Soda” on day one, mile 0.0, of his 4,700 mile journey.

(photo credit: Aaron Landon’s Facebook page)

that he’s made it to the 1,000 mile mark, all he can think about is pushing for that 2,000 mile goal, and so on.

His network of support that spans across the country is maintained through personal text messages and phone calls, also facebook. The social media platforms are only the highlights of his trips. “They don’t see my soggy feet or the 20 miles of walking in the rain.”

Aaron has spent quite a bit of time hiking outside of the US. His favorite hike has been from the Mediterranean Sea to the Atlantic Ocean. This hike went across the Pyrenees Mountains, starting in France, going through Portugal and eventually Spain.

“I like to do a lot of the lesser known trails. I like to be remote and be by myself out there.” He hopes to get up into Canada and Alaska in the future. If you would like to find updates on Aaron’s journey, you can tune into his facebook page listed above.



## Upcoming Events

### Two Harbors Farmers Market

Saturday, June 4

10:00 AM - 1:00 PM

*Homemade goods fresh from your neighbors!*

### Live Music at Castle Danger Brewery

Friday, June 3: Billy Johnson

*Food Truck Oasis Del Norte from 4-8 PM*

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Saturday, June 4: Driftless Revelers

*Food Truck BoB-a-Que Smokehouse from 4-8 PM*

MUSIC: 6:00 - 8:00 PM

### Live Music at Harbor Rail Pub

Saturday, June 4: Andy Hauswirth

7:00 - 10:00 PM

### Live Music at Larsmont Cottages

Saturday, June 4: Kevin Buck

6:00 - 9:00 PM

### Sunday Picnic Concert at Agate Acres Farm

Sunday, June 12: Kyle Ollah

*Join us for a free picnic concert with music by Kyle Ollah, a multi-faceted strings player from Duluth, Minnesota! Bring your own lunch and picnic blanket.*

Must register at:

<https://www.jolenebrink.com/tending-home>