

The Shoes of a Hiker

“A journey of a lifetime. A journey for a life cut short.”

When Rob Simmt’s wife Beth died in 2012, so did their dream of

sharing the achievement of walking the entire Bruce Trail. One year later, Rob renewed the plan, and started an end-to-end hike in Beth’s memory.

“Instead of Beth it was her boots that accompanied me,” he says. He carried her shoes with him as a way of finishing what they started.

Rob and Beth had only been married 10 years. Their first date was in 2001, when they celebrated her birthday at Webster’s Falls. “I believe we fell in love on that icy trail next to the fast running water,” he remembers. They married in January 2002.

“That summer, we decided to hike the complete trail. We became Bruce Trail hikers.

Our goal became to hike the trail end to end in our own time, in our own way.”

Beth’s work colleague Sharon Vanoosten heard about the plan and she and husband Bill decided to join in. “We would do this together,” says Rob. “The four of us enjoying a great footpath to Tobermory. The four of us only hiked one weekend at Rattlesnake Point.”

Beth died of cancer on May 31, 2012.

Honouring Beth

“Something special needed to happen to honour Beth,” Rob continues. “With many friends and great effort we had two very successful golf tournaments. We raised over \$20,000 for the Bruce Trail. As a result of these efforts there is now a permanent plaque located at Thirty Mile Creek near Beamsville in her honour.”

Retracing the steps he had taken with Beth, on June 1, 2013, Rob started his memorial



▲ A sight Beth didn’t get to see. Rob Simmt looks at a Bruce Trail waterfall. Beth’s hiking shoes (*inset*) are attached to his backpack. PHOTO BY BILL VANOOSTEN.



▲ During the Bruce Trail end-to-end adventure: Rob and Beth Simmt, Sharon and Bill Vanoosten. PHOTO SUBMITTED.

hike at the southern cairn of the Bruce Trail in Queenston. “This was a time to reflect,” he says. “I know Beth was with me.”

Bill and Sharon joined him where the four of them had left off. “We would finish what we started, we were all

in. We did day hikes on a regular basis, usually around 20 km. We hiked in all four seasons, the cool, often wet

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and muddy spring, the hot and buggy summer, the wonderful fall colours and the snow of the winter. Weather became secondary as we just enjoyed the trail. Some thought us crazy as we never called off a day of hiking, rain, snow, ice, hot, cold or just plain perfect. It was great to be on the trail and I wouldn’t have wanted any one else with me. Bill and Sharon are great hikers, after-hikers and people. The Bruce trail offered us many adventures, climbs, descents, crevices, rivers, waterfalls, too many to write about. We all knew Beth was with us as she made sure to play a few tricks on us but mostly she presented her wonderful smile in the reflections, rainbows and even the northern lights.”

Rob made a life-changing decision to retire to Costa Rica, which meant he had to finish the hike by the end of 2015. He and the Vanoostens decided to make monthly three-day hikes of 50 km, finishing with a week-long hike at the end. To celebrate their final 84 kms, they rented a cottage at Cape Hurd with a hot tub and invited people to stay.

“My step daughter Nicole, Beth’s daughter, Bill and Sharon’s son Brad, my daughter Nicole — yes, two Nicoles, and Bill and Sharon’s daughter Kari along with her boyfriend Ryan all helped us celebrate throughout the week,” Rob recounts. “On Friday Oct 9 at 2:45 P.M. we touched the northern cairn. We finished what we started.”



▲ Bill and Sharon Vanoosten with Rob Simmt. PHOTO SUBMITTED.



▲ Four of the nine supportive co-workers who call themselves Team B.S., for Beth Simmt, toasting her memory, from left: Toni Castelli, Cheryl Dimercurio, Sharon Vanoosten and Diane Westveer. The plaque, at Thirty Mile Creek near Beamsville, reads “In memory of Beth Simmt. She loved every step she hiked. We hike for and with her.” PHOTO BY ROB SIMMT.

MORE INFO:

Rob’s website www.bethsbootsahiking.com documents this journey. The song on the site was written to mark the hike. Donations to The Bruce Trail in honour of Beth would be appreciated. Cheques marked “In honour of Beth Simmt” can be mailed to The Bruce Trail Conservancy, P.O. Box 857, Hamilton ON L8N 3N9.