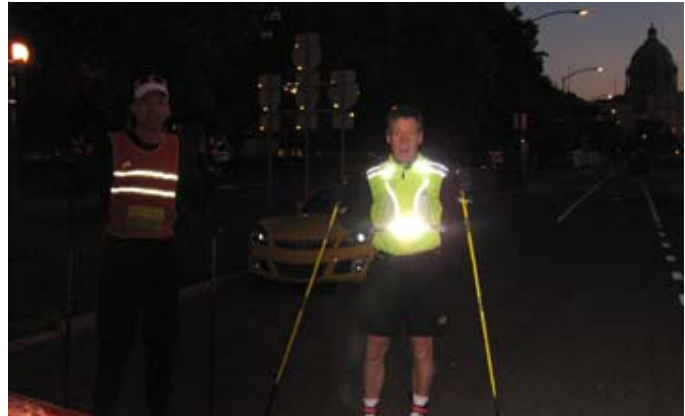


**Roller 'Ike' from St. Paul to Duluth
Red Cross Fundraiser
Oct 4th / 5th**



Well we are still alive. After last years Border to Bluff rollerski marathon that took us from Lake Hendrick to Red Wing over 3 hot days in summer, we were looking for something shorter, easier and definitely cooler. So this year we decided on a rollerski from St. Paul to Duluth - that's shorter and should have been easier - IF we had taken 3 days, but no, we had to up the ante and aim to do it in 2 days. Nothing like a challenge to motivate one and its always easy to set the goal before the event. So planning in earnest started about 2 days before our scheduled



7:00 am on the Saturday morning with the Capitol Building in the background and 160 miles to go.

rollerski. We had still to decide whether to go north to south or south to north. Then we found out that 10,000+ marathon runners would be coming into St. Paul on Sunday Oct 5th and while we like the support of a cheering crowd as much as anyone else, we were more likely to be arrested for illegal participation in the marathon. So we opted for a south to north run. Leaving Rochester around 5:30 am we got to the Capital just before 7:00 am. Conditions were ideal - no wind and temperatures around 40F. Jeff Robertson had again agreed to provide support - absolutely critical for this type of run. The biggest issue was how to get out of the city without taking I-35 !!! Thankfully John Thompson from Skijornow (<http://www.skijornow.com/skijornowhome.html>) had researched a route for us and had biked a number of options to find the most rollerski friendly way north. So with John's route in hand we headed left the Capitol Building at 7:00 am and headed north through small back roads, eventually getting on Edgerton Road and Centerville road before crossing over I-35 and cruising along by Bald Eagle lake into Hugo. Wow - sunrise over the lake was worth a short stop and photo op. By 9 am we

were in Hugo and hooked up with the Harwood Creek Trail / Sunrise Prairie Trail which took us all the way through Wyoming and Stacy into North Branch. This was by far and away the nicest trail we have ever rollerskied on - 26 miles of very wide and very smooth trail. By 11:30 we were in North Branch for a short lunch. Up to then this



Sunrise on Bald Eagle lake

had been a smooth easy rollerski with a light tail wind and we were thinking - hey maybe we could make it all the way to Duluth by Saturday night - we had even brought along headlamps just in case.

Fool were we - at North Branch we were forced to use highway 61. This has a hard shoulder - technically. Unfortunately it was very pitted, rough and full of debris. After over two hours of rattling over this we finally crawled into Pine City. It was now 1:30 pm and we had covered 69 miles, but our legs were feeling the effects of the bad road and any notion of rollerskiing to Duluth in one day were long gone. We gave our legs a short break and took off again to cover the last 15 miles into Hinckley. Fortunately we crossed county lines somewhere before Pine City and although the road now had a narrower hard shoulder, it was in very good condition with little debris. In addition Jeff had been riding shotgun behind us since North Branch so that kept the traffic off our backs. We rolled into Hinckley at 3:15 pm with 84 miles covered for our first major stop of the day. Off to the nearest Subway for some proper food and a rest.

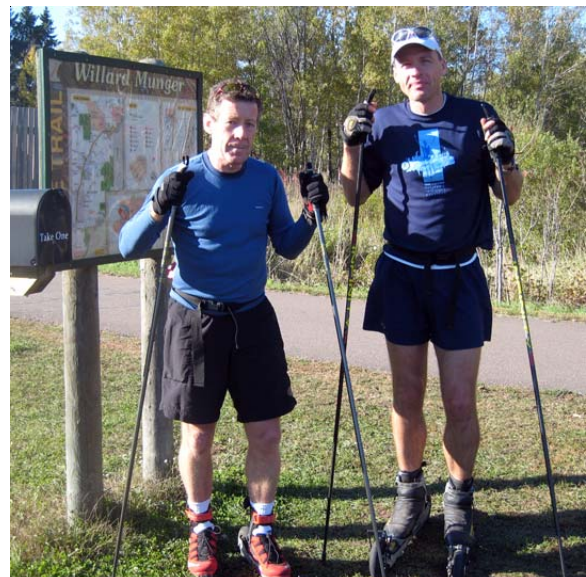


Rolling along on the trail north of Hugo.



Pine City and the effects of ~70 miles are beginning to show!

Now the sensible thing to do would have been to stop there and do the 70 miles from Hinckley to Duluth the next day. But it was still early and we felt we could get to the century mark before our bodies completely gave out on us. At 4:20 pm we were staring at the Hinckley end of the Willard Munger trail with 70 miles to go. In retrospect, stopping for a hour was probably not the best idea. The body stiffens up (at least it does at our age), and just bending down to put on the rollerskis was a challenge. Finally we were off again on a trail. The Willard Munger was not as smooth as we had hoped (by this time we were experts on the quality of road surfaces !) with more pearock in the base that made for a rough ride. At 6:00 pm we finally rolled into Rutledge at the 102 mile mark. Any thoughts of covering more distance were long gone and despite



Day 1 - starting on the Willard Munger trail for the last 18 mile segment of the day.

the meal our bodies were running on empty. Jeff was there to pick us up (literally) and carted us off to a motel in Sandstone.

Sunday morning brought some clouds, but nothing as bad as what the marathon runners had to face in Minneapolis. The wind had now shifted and we faced a moderate head wind on the trail. We had 52 miles to cover. Given what we had done on Saturday, that should have been easy - but the previous day have taken a toll. My body had one speed - slow, and Henry was nursing a sore shoulder. By 7:30 am we were on the trail to find that the surface was better than the earlier section. The only disconcerting

aspect was being able to see the trail stretch all the way to a vanishing point on the horizon. The only slight mishap of the trip occurred at Moose Lake where one of my ski poles jammed between the wooden beams over a river and I snapped off the bottom 2 inches. Fortunately we have just left Jeff and a quick double back for a new pole and we were on the trail again. We reached Carlton by 11:40 am and stopped for the last time for some snacks and drinks. We probably saw less than a dozen people on the trail between Rutledge and Carlton and wondered why we had not seen anyone else on rollerskis coming up from Duluth that morning. Once we hit the last segment to Duluth we realized why. This part of the trail was in poor condition with a lot of small bubbles in the tarmac where the tarmac sticks up 2-3 inches - just enough to catch the underside of your rollerski and take you down. So we were constantly dodging these pavement bubbles. This trail drops several hundred feet and we had visions of coasting downhill to the finish. Well although the weather remained good, we now had a strong head wind and had to work hard to keep a reasonable pace. Over the last few miles dropping into Duluth we were treated to spectacular scenery, river gorges and views over Duluth. Of course when all you can think about is stopping, none of this registers until long afterwards. Finally we rolled into the car park at the north end of the trail. Jeff had gotten lost somewhere between Carlton and the trail head and was 10 minutes out. Hunger was getting the best of us and we were speculating on our chances of success if we were to raid the monkey enclosure in Duluth Zoo just across from the trail head. Fortunately Jeff appeared before we had the energy to do much and after devouring packs of trail mix we were out cold in the car while Jeff headed for home. All in all an interesting trip and worth doing. From the photo taken when we arrived back in Rochester, we almost look normal again!!



Trailhead with Duluth Zoo in the background and 2 tired skiers in the foreground.

A full set of photos from the event can be found on the RASC web site.

So to all who have donated or plan to, many thanks. As always, everything you donate goes to Red Cross and all donations are fully tax deductible. If you have not donated and would still like to do so, we won't refuse! We have donations of \$1200 so far and are hoping to reach the \$2000 by the time all donations are in.

Many thanks

Michael O'Connor / Henry Walker / Jeff Robertson

