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Nimblewill Nomad's latest trek retraces the steps of Lewis and Clark

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Two days into his epic 4,000-mile trek from the Florida Keys to Quebec, M.J. Eberhart struggled through waist-deep swamp water seeking dry ground for a place to rest.

Wet and shaking, he settled onto a dry patch of grass between two pine trees and fired up his hobo stove to cook some lunch.

Better known by his trail name, the Nimblewill Nomad, Eberhart began backpacking in the 1980s, to make up for 30 years cooped in his Florida optometry practice. Now approaching 70, the Nomad continues to amaze with his foot-cracking journeys.

The trip from the Keys to Canada took 10 months, roughly the equivalent of walking the Appalachian Trail twice in a row. Not quite satisfied that he had seen it all, the Nomad did the trip in reverse following a slightly different route that took him down the entire length of the Appalachian Mountain chain.

He wrote a book about each of the journeys, both of which are classics. His first book, Ten Million Steps, sold out years ago. Used copies sell for \$80 to \$300. Ten Million Steps is being re-released, though, this coming spring by Birmingham-based Menasha Ridge Press.

Not one to slow down and gather moss, the Nomad recently completed an out-and-back tracing of the entire Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail, beginning in St. Louis and ending at the Pacific Ocean.

With the impending release of his new book, the Nomad is making the rounds at key events to help get the word out.

One event that area hikers and backpackers should not miss, which the Nomad will attend, is the annual Alabama Hiking Trail Society conference at Bald Rock Lodge inside Cheaha State Park. The event is slated for March 30 through April 1. Visit its Web site to register early at www.alabamatrail.com. Birmingham resident Russell Helms is the author of "60 Hikes Within 60 Miles: Birmingham" and "GPS Outdoors." He can be reached at rhelms@menasharidge.com.