

Elk River To International Falls And Back, In 1 Day

March 9, 2011 6:48 PM

By John Lauritsen, WCCO-TV

PRIOR LAKE, Minn. (WCCO) – It is safe to say that a lot of us are tired of winter, but a Prior Lake man can't get enough of it.

Last Friday, he did something pretty unthinkable. David Van Wie and his friend Luke Waldriff drove their snowmobiles from the Twin Cities to the Canadian border and back, in less than 24 hours.

“It's certainly not as the crow flies, but the crow never drove a snowmobile,” said Van Wie.

It is hard enough to make that trip in a car, much less a snowmobile. For the record, the 60-year-old Van Wie will tell you the trip is about 830 total miles.

“It's a number a lot of people have in mind and I decided to just go for it,” said Van Wie.

About 15 years ago, Van Wie began wondering just how far he could go in a single day. So last Friday, he and his friend Waldriff of Lighthouse Motorsports got an Elk River bartender to sign off at 12:01 a.m., and the two men took off for International Falls — but not blindly.

“I got the biggest windshield I could find and then raised it another 4 inches,” said Van Wie.

Spoken like the true engineer he is, Van Wie had modified his 2005 Arctic Cat, and Waldriff did the same to his snowmobile. They calculated that to make it work, they could only be off their snowmobiles for two hours for gas, food and other essentials.

During the trip their average speed was 38-miles-an-hour and the route was far from a straight shot. They had to jump from trail to trail and sometimes they had to drive where there was no snow at all. That took a physical toll on their bodies and on their machines, but they stopped at every stop sign and never went above the speed limit. And minutes before midnight, they arrived in Elk River where the very same bartender signed off once more.

“Not a good time for drinks on the house, but it was a great celebration. Although half an hour later, we were in bed. It was exhausting,” said Van Wie.

Van Wie said a police officer actually pulled them over briefly because he thought it was strange they were snowmobiling in the middle of the night.

Van Wie credits Waldriff, a snowmobile dealer, for getting them through.

He said he would not do the trip again, but would help others map it out.

