

Amazing Journey

Alan Jaeckel

It began with a single step on the Holy Hill Segment of the Ice Age Trail on a beautiful day in 2014. After 3.5 miles we turned around and retraced every step. Little did we know what an incredible journey had just begun. In fact, we didn't know that it had begun! However, a seed had been planted in my wife's head that we should try to hike the entire Ice Age Trail. I was skeptical. The time, travel, and money involved seemed overwhelming. After all it was over 1,100 miles long and if we did what we had just done, we would be hiking it twice! But the seed began to grow and by 2016 we had decided to go for it.

I'd like to say thank you to all the incredible volunteers who make this trail possible and who helped us complete it. People like Buzz Meyer who spends untold hours shuttling hikers, besides maintaining the trail, or Joe Jopek who has been volunteering for 50 years, just naming two.

We began with trips close to home with out and backs and then with two vehicles. In June of 2016 we started three consecutive summers of week-long trips to the north woods. Starting at the western terminus we headed east. Each year we would hit a stretch of weather with 80° and even 90° temperatures, with high humidity, which was definitely not fun and left us beat. So, we changed our strategy to weekends and after we both were retired to three- or four-day trips. We also began doing more hiking during the months of January, February and March.

On January 6, 2021 we did a fill in, out and back of the Sauk Point Segment on a heavily overcast, foggy day with about 6 inches of snow and thick hoar frost covering everything. It was absolutely beautiful! On February 23, 2021 we had a wonderful hike on the Skunk and Foster Lake Segments on a beautiful sunny day with about 4 inches of fresh snow and discovered snow fleas by the millions!

Along the way we discovered many of the beautiful places that are Wisconsin. Places like Gibraltar Rock, Dells of the Eau Claire, and Grandfather Falls, to name just a few. Spring time was especially beautiful when the woods were filled with blooming trilliums, anemone, trout lilies and hepaticas.

One would think that you could lose a few pounds after hiking over 1,100 miles. But alas, we also discovered too many good places to eat! A burger or pizza and beer were too often the reward after an eight-to twelve-mile hike.

We completed our trek on July 11, 2022, just hours after Arlette Laan finished her historic hike. Our entire family joined us to hike the final 4.9 miles to the eastern terminus in Door County. And you guessed it, more celebrating with eating and drinking!