

I'd like to start by saying thank you to everybody at the IATA for all of the work you do - along with all the volunteers who have given their time, sweat, money, and good old elbow grease to this trail. The IAT is a beauty of a long distance trail - and I am honored to have been able to start at one end and walk to the other, delighting each day in the wonderful Wisconsin landscape and people along the way.

During the winter, before I started my hike I read every book I could find on the trail - the geology, the guide books, past hikers accounts, etc. sort of steeped my mind in the history and make up of the trail. That way when I started early in the spring at the western terminus I had a mental reference point or framework that I could add my own experiences to and thereby gain a knowledge of the trail as a whole - for example instead of just learning what an esker is or how it's made I could add to that the thrill of running along the sandy top, the feel of the breeze blowing over the steep sides, and delight in the twisting river shaped flow of earth in front of me. I know it sounds crazy (probably is but I don't care haha) but I "know" eskers now - not just know about them. And man, I love 'em.

When I started in April the weather was still very cold (temps at night in the 20s) and nobody, and I mean nobody, was out on the trail in the north. I think I saw about 5 or six people in my first month on the trail. At one point I went over a week without seeing a soul. Eventually, the farther I walked and the warmer the weather became I began to encounter more folks out there - and that is to me one of the joys of a Thru hike. I love the isolation and solitude that a trail provides as well as the brief company of others enjoying the fantastical beauty that the natural world provides.

I film my hikes and tell the stories of my journey in a series of videos that I put on YouTube. I wanted to post every two days and show a little of every section of this trail to keep the content as close to real time as possible. It is my creative outlet and quite unlike most other hikers vlogs, as I share the beauty and wonders of the trail (big and small), the blisters and brown water too haha, instead of just the hum drum "today is such and such date and this is mile blah blah". I found that many people were introduced to the IAT as a whole 1200mile trail from watching, others were inspired to get out to explore and hike sections near them, and others actually set out to find me as I tramped along. The "Huck Hunters" (that just blows me away haha) entire families walked sections of trail taking their best guess as to where I was each day hoping to find me. I have been deeply inspired by and love this amazing trail and am honored to have shared that joy in such a way as to inspire others to experience the beauty and wonderment for themselves.

Man oh man I'm just rambling now haha. I guess I'll try to sum things up. In addition to the variety and beauty of the trail sections is the beauty of the trails people. Nearing the end of July, my skin sun was browned like a toad, from walking the forest, prairie, and road. I was approaching the entrance of Potawatomi SP in the evening when a woman came out of a house behind me and shouted down to street to me. "Hey Huck!" I stopped and turned around. She shouted "Congratulations!" A perfect stranger, man I about fell over. That sums up the beauty of the road walks to me. The kindness of the people along the way. A short while later as I

walked Thru the campground a Huck-hunter had left a note on the board saying they reserved a site for a few days for me to camp if/when I got there (unbelievable!). The next morning I rose with the sun and finished the incredible journey alone and in perfect silence. Just the sun, the end stone, and me. What a trail!

This short essay probably sounds like a rambling babble, forgive me. If you watch only one of my videos of the trail I would say please check out #50 Last One There Wins. I feel I express my thoughts of this journey as a whole straight from the heart and much clearer than this phone typed jumble lol. I'll end it by saying that the ice age trail was more challenging, more rewarding, more beautiful, more varied, more painful, more social, more isolated, more delightful, and more magical than I ever thought it would be. I am proud to have been able to complete my thru hike, and honored to have been able to share my experiences with so many people. If there is anything I can do in the future to help raise awareness of and support the ice age trail and it's volunteers please let me know.

Sincerely

-Huck was Here

Amos Thies

p.s. Happy Hiking 🥾