

Thousand-Miler Essay
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I grew up in Wisconsin, within 1/2 hour drive of the IAT, yet I had never heard of it until I was invited to join a running group at Lapham Peak in 2016. As we entered the park, I saw a flyer advertising the trail and I had to learn more. I was surprised to find that I had run on several segments of the IAT in the Kettle Moraine without any knowledge of the size and scope of the trail. Being the kind of person who likes to set goals that seem comfortably out of reach, I decided that I would make it a goal to complete the trail over 10 years, despite being a single mom with three kids, a full-time job, and very little spare time. My first official segment was Devil's Lake, which I completed with my kids. They would go on to join me for many more segments, sometimes hiking, and sometimes just for a shuttle and refreshments at road crossings. The majority of segments were done solo, though, with my bike serving as a shuttle. In the end, it took me a little over 5 years to complete the IAT.

The trail brought me countless benefits -- good health, fresh air, animal sightings, but the most valuable benefit was to my confidence and self-esteem. Friends thought I was crazy when I got up at 4am to drive 4 hours across the state, bike 10+ miles, run or hike 15+ miles, and then drive home all in the same day. They thought I was crazier when I would drive up north to hike, sleep in my car on a forest road in freezing temperatures, bike and hike the next day and then drive home. I never felt unsafe on the trail...only when I was chased by dogs on the connecting routes. The more I did it, though, the more my friends learned about this great gift that the Alliance has given to our state. They watched my progress as I documented my journey in photos, and some even asked to join me along the way. Each hurdle that I had to overcome made me a stronger outdoors-woman, and I took the skills I learned to other adventures, like multiweek backpacking solo on the Colorado Trail. It is with mixed feelings that I reached the Eastern Terminus yesterday and completed my journey. I will miss marking off the completed segments after a tiring day of hiking, but I look forward to repeating the segments I loved the most and helping friends reach their goals of becoming Thousand Milers. Thank you, Ice Age Trail Alliance and volunteers for all that you do to make this trail possible!