

Ice Age Trail Summary - Anne Rogalski

Although I finished the Ice Age Trail on October 1, 2022, I have been unable to sit down and craft this email. When I questioned my hesitancy, I realized that submitting my summary and itinerary means the journey is truly over. I suspect I am not the only one who completes the trail and struggles with the concept. For three years my husband and I have been creatively juggling our work schedules and weekends, traveling across the state, chasing yellow blazes. What started as a ten year goal of casual hikes became one consumed with weather patterns, bike and car shuttles, hunting for campsites (resulting in mastering boondocking), and coordinating with family and friends to enjoy the incredible national scenic trail in Wisconsin.

Even though both my husband and I were born and raised in Wisconsin, we were pleasantly surprised to discover new towns and businesses of which we were totally unaware. My husband is a reluctant hiker, however, the promise of tap beer (at a microbrewery or dive bar) was all the incentive he needed. The geological and natural beauty of the surroundings would quickly win him over, until mile nine or ten, at which point I would remind him of the cool, refreshing beverage awaiting him.

My first hikes were out and back. I soon began researching quicker ways to tackle the miles and stumbled upon the "Thousand Miler Wannabes" Facebook Group. From there I learned the trick of biking first then hiking back, monitored trail conditions each day, reviewed recommended places to visit and park, and researched numerous resources available to hikers. I already used All Trails, but I joined the Ice Age Trail Alliance and purchased the three ring binder of maps, the trail guide, and the large wall map (all three of which I highlighted with each hike).

Connecting routes were my least favorite, which I assume is the case for the majority of the hikers. My husband provided shuttle service for me on these sections after a few uncomfortable encounters with men in trucks (Rusk County was rough). Hiking alone as a woman carries some risks. On the upside, connecting routes allowed me to knock out 50 miles in a single day during my 2020 Challenge Walk MS. As background, in 1999 when I was diagnosed with MS; the doctor told me "Do not stop moving". The Ice Age Trail is one vehicle that has given me the opportunity to keep moving and I am incredibly grateful for all volunteers and donors before me who made the trail possible. For the past year, people have asked me, "What will you do after completing the trail?" I shared that I planned to volunteer where I could, which I have already been able to do via baked goods at the New Hope Segment event last weekend (I had to work my day job and could not provide onsite work). Also, next month I will give a presentation on my quest to University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point lifelong learners.

Another question frequently asked by others is "What is your favorite section"? I find I have many answers for a variety of reasons. Any segment with eskers rises to the top, especially in the summer. The cool breezes and shading provided immediate relief from heat and humidity. On other segments I discovered perched lakes, crossed countless beaver dams, said hello to a few bears, took up animal tracking, and embraced my time away from a computer screen. Only two hikes left me with unpleasant memories: Straight Lake (mosquitoes so thick we ran despite wearing nets and bug spray) and Newwood (mud, roots, bears, and logging were challenging after a long bike ride to the trailhead).

As documentation of my hikes/itinerary, I have attached my spreadsheet. A few hikes are marked completed before my official start date of May 2020, but I did cover them again in my three year stretch. I was unaware of hiking them previously, but my All Trails App would share that I had completed them already on the date listed. Some segments I have hiked three to five times, based on family and friends who asked me to enjoy sections with them. I look forward to completing many of them again in the near future.