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Ice Age Trail Section Hiker Essay
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Ice Age Trail Journey

It all began with the 2021 Mammoth Challenge. What a great way to get out and enjoy my favorite season and get some exercise. I hiked 42 miles that month (mostly in the Chippewa Moraine Chapter) and then was laid up with a knee injury. It took another 8 months to get on the trail again.

My first hike back was on the Northern Blue Hills Segment in June 2022. Each time I get out there and see the first yellow blaze entering the woods, my whole body just undergoes a sigh of release. My thoughts at that time were to eventually hike all the segments in the state - who wants to walk on the roads?!? Then I ran into Laura Hinesh and her friend and she questioned why wouldn't I hike the whole thing? That got me thinking and researching - only ~600 miles of the trail were actual segments at that time. So I decided to do the whole thing! My goal was to get it done by the age of 60, I was 52 then.

I went back and filled in the connecting road gaps and getting the segments done within an hour of where I live - my husband was a great shuttler. By August I was working on the long CR between Cornell and Lake Eleven and bike shuttled myself. I would end up bike shuttling 150 miles over the course of this journey.

I was wondering how to get the long Taylor and Lincoln County segments done, bike shuttling would have been difficult and it was a little too far from home for my husband to shuttle. This is when I got out of my comfort zone and asked for

help from chapter coordinators and trail angels - it's really hard for me to ask for help so this was a huge step! Buzz Meyer was my first shuttler - I ended up shuttling with him 5 times! Karla Larson shuttled me 8 times and I was also shuttled by many others including an old professor of mine from UWSP. Besides the many shuttles from my husband, I used shuttlers 26 times!

I also realized it would be easier to backpack these longer segments in the North Woods. My son with experience in backpacking went with me the first time (and my daughter didn't want to miss out so she came too) and we did Lake Eleven and Jerry Lake - 3 days and 2 nights. I loved it and started ordering all the gear (water filtration, stove, etc) that he had. I ended up solo backpacking for 7 more days and solo camping (in state parks) for 16 days on this journey. I love it so much that I am planning to thru-hike the Superior Hiking Trail next year and I have become gear obsessed (upgrading to lighter backpacking gear). My favorite campsite was TA-24 on the Jerry Lake segment - this was my first solo trip and was on the bog lake. It was beautiful, peaceful and wondrous with the unique bog plants.

While I did most of the trail solo, I did meet a wonderful hiking partner. Michael Donahue was looking for help on the Eastern Bifurcation which we got done together in 4 days in winter 2023. We ended up hiking a few more times after that for a total of 108 miles.

In 2022, I hiked 359 miles (145 in October alone!) and by 2023 I was pretty obsessed. Finish by 60 years old? Ha, now I'm planning to finish on my 54th birthday on October 26, 2023. 721 more miles in 2023 got me to this goal. 22.6 miles was my biggest hiking day. Staying in VRBOs with my husband and dogs really helped get the miles in further from home. My husband was amazed at the different sights around the state. We stayed in 4 different VRBOs (Hartland, Lake

Koshkonong, Two Rivers and Sturgeon Bay) for 19 nights. I also stayed in hotels 8 times in the winter of 2022-2023.

I finished the trail at the Eastern Terminus on my birthday, October 26, 2023 - in the rain. My husband, son and girlfriend and brother-in-law hiked the last mile with me. My sister hiked 8 miles of the Sturgeon Bay segment with me the day before and I hiked 16 miles the day before that in thunderstorms with hail. The end took awhile to sink in - I will miss all the planning, solo time and traveling around this beautiful state.

I loved the wind in the tree tops, seeing the first blaze of the day, lakes, creeks and rivers, storms in my tent. My favorite geological feature was the eskers - it was cool to learn so much about Ice Age geology during this journey. Concerning moments included seeing bears 3 times on Tuscobia, a charging mama turkey, charging dogs on the connecting routes and a scary experience while camping at Wood Lake Campground on Halloween Night.

I experienced tremendous personal growth over the last two years. Doing things out of my comfort zone has led me to new passions in my life. I'm planning solo thru-hikes. I am now volunteering with the Chippewa Moraine Chapter and Blue Hills Chapter (I live on the CR between them). I'm learning how to maintain and build trails and also shuttling other Thousand Miler Wannabes. The folks I met throughout this journey have become my tribe - what a great community to be part of for the rest of my life.

Thanks volunteers, landowners, hikers and the Ice Age Trail Alliance - this has been an epic journey!