

Hiking the Ice Age Trail

While writing a research paper for Community Health, I researched aspects of environmental health available in Walworth County WI, community offerings and general environmental health statistics. The Walworth Jefferson Chapter of the Ice Age Trail (IAT) offered hikes every Tuesday and Wednesday. I went to a hike and attended a chapter meeting. The people from these hikes and meetings I have come to be acquainted with are remarkable. They seem to have found their Blue Zone, engaged, active and in the present. After finishing school commitments, I started hiking with this group regularly, so much so, that when Covid started a few of us continued to hike together and this is how I started hiking the IAT. Started June 1st 2020 and finished at Devils Lake state park from UW Baraboo (the western loop) October 19th 2023.

Since the Walworth/Jefferson Chapter is at the southern end, we branched out from there, sometimes going east and sometimes going west depending on weather and drive time and we hiked in all seasons. By we, I mean three to four others, Andy, Gary, Nancy and Ron. Andy and I completed the IAT together, both loops and the others accompanied when available. We did this in segments, no camping but inexpensive hotel/motels and VRBOs. It took us a little over three years to complete, working around family commitments and work schedules. The trail took us to places I would have never experienced and we have incredible memories/trail tales to share.

Just a few to share; walking along a stream at dusk after a storm trying to get the last 5 miles for the day in, I kept getting hit by toads with Olympic quality hopping ability; a small town called Clarks Ferry would have the best cheese burgers; I would be walking along the path of the original road track of Elkhart Lake; joking with Amish carpenters about rocking out; enjoying the beauty of the Dells of Eau Claire; going down the Balanced Rock Trail in winter (mostly on my butt like sledding, due to the snow); crossing streams by walking across beaver dams or trees when bridges/board walks have been washed away; talking with a monk while hiking thru Holy Hill; getting rides from trail angels after blowing 2 tires in the same day; walking thru a field of horses that want to be right next to you; finding out Harrison Hills is a back breaker and that mosquitoes can bite thru yoga pants; falling in deep snow holes on the west side of Grandfather Falls; not getting lost in the Kettle Bowl. I could go on and on. The trail is so different for everyone and everyone will find something amazing.

I continue to tout these experiences, taking friends and family on parts of the trail. It's awesome to see their excitement when finding blazes and paths. My advice to all, just get out and enjoy life, go to a park, join community activities, be alive.

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