

When I started this year I had no intent of hiking the IAT at all let alone hiking it all. I have been talking about hiking the AT for years and had set Spring of 2024 to do it. I had started buying gear early this year in preparation for that endeavor. Once I had a set of decent gear, I decided I would test it by hiking the Wild Goose trail. This is where the IAT came to be on my radar. While hiking the Wild Goose Trail I seen a promo sign for the Walk the Wauk hiking incentive program. I decied I would try to do it the weekend after the Wild Goose Trail. So, I did it and while looking into it I seen all the other programs in other counties. I then decided to do the Washington County program. Somewhere while doing these early segments, I decided to do the whole IAT before I leave to do the AT.

So, I diligently made my way out to the IAT and hiked every weekend and was just amazed by the diverse geology of the state I live in. From the limestone ridges that are around my home to the the black rocks that dominate the areas by the St.Croix River to the flatter areas in the Driftless to the amazing red granite on display in Montello, I was blown away by how I have lived here my whole life and did not know just how truly unique the landscape of Wisconsin is. Even how roads are different from West to East. River Stone, which is quite unique in my area is used on the the shoulders of roads to the northwest as if it were just regular old gravel. The challenge of the large hills all along the trail and just how high up they go was amazing. They are by no means mountains, but the terrain is truly challenging throughout the trail.

I also started to notice the people that hiked the trail to those who volunteer and maintain the trail and the people who are paid to do the administration of the trail. All these people are a unique brand of people. All of them seemed so genuine and easy going. I believe their close contact to the trail and nature genuinely made them into or reinforced their great moral character. Volunteers in a booth at an event in Janesville telling me just how much the trail keeps them going daily and just how passionate they are about what they do helped me to see just how passionate I am about what I was doing. I love my work and what I do for a living, but I was finding it harder and harder each week to stop my hiking adventure to go back to work for the week. I was inspired by the community to do more and be more than I had been. I began to realize I would not be satisfied with just finishing the IAT and AT. I wanted to stay in touch close touch with the large hiking community. Right now, I am hiking but I am sure in the future I will be a volunteer. I now cannot imagine not being involved in one way or another.

I started to formulate a plan in my head to do more than I had planned to do. I read about Apple Pie (Arnette Laan) somewhere along the way and decided I would hike all 11 of the National Scenic Trails as well. I then even more passionately threw myself at this endeavor while still working full time. I told my boss I would be quitting my job and not returning anytime soon and that I was going to hike all of the trails. To my surprise he was also excited, not that I was leaving, but that I was going to do this. He was happy for me and even helped me make it happen and encouraged my hikes. I was starting to find what I think I was looking for the very first day I had read that article about the AT. I was not looking to find myself or the meaning of life. I was desperately trying to restore my faith in humanity. I also started to realize that I was inspiring others to be better people and to do the things they want to do but always thought they could not. When I seen people saying things about the trails they would always say that you just need to do it. It is not that hard to start just do it and quit talking about doing it. I thought that it was nonsense. How does one drop everything and just walk away. It is because when you start this you gain something more important than anything else you get from a job or being caught up in the rat race most people are running. Here you gain true freedom and sense of inner peace that will shape you for the rest of your life. You gain what few find and cherish more than anything else.

As I write this essay I am already on to the next big adventure. I am currently on the Florida trail in the middle of Big Cypress preserve. I am listening to the owls and it made me think of back home on the IAT and how peaceful this all is. Whether in a swamp in Florida or climbing up and down the steep unforgiving hills of the Harrison Hills on the IAT, I have never felt a more intense sense of accomplishment as I do after a hard day's hike. I finally found what I have been looking for my whole life. Serenity. It was always right in my backyard. Well breakfast is done and another adventure calls. Here's to the good life.

Cheers!

By

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