

## **Carol Erickson's Ice Age Trail Summary – 2/14/2024**

My Ice Age trail journey began when my world was in turmoil and ended with restoration and peace. Like many fellow IAT hikers, I took to the trails during COVID in 2020.

In March 2020 my gym in Oregon, IL was shuttered due to the pandemic. I worked from home and spent my days in front of a computer screen ten hours a day. Needing to get out of the house, I reached out to my neighbor, a middle school PE teacher who was also feeling like a sloth. We started meeting most days to walk my dog. Our daily walks went from neighborhood walks to exploring local state parks and forest preserves. By summer, we were looking for a challenge.

My friend, Carolyn suggested that we consider walking around Lake Geneva in the fall. We started training and decided one of our training sessions would include a weekend hiking at Devil's Lake. The Mammoth Challenge was going on while we were at Devil's Lake so we signed up for the challenge. Our love of hiking and camping was rekindled. That's when my obsession with the Ice Age trail was sparked!

After our 20 mile hike around Lake Geneva, we headed to Whitewater trails for a post-day cooldown hike. At that time we decided to pursue the *Trail*. During the winter months we hiked the southern trails on weekends. We planned hiking/camping trips to the Southern Kettle Moraine area in the spring and a 5-day trip to the western terminus region when school got out. We made Straight Lake campgrounds our headquarters for the week. After putting in 12-16 miles/day hiking, we came back to our remote campsite for dinner and an evening swim in the lake with the trumpeter swans!

The rest is history. Carolyn joined me for weekend hikes when she could, but I ventured off for many solo out/back hikes. I reached out to a college friend who lived near Milwaukee to join me for hikes and camping in her area. She later joined me for trips farther from home.

As I started hiking further from my home in northern Illinois, I decided I need to find shuttles and other people to hike with. Over the last two years, local chapters have provided many shuttles. I have been grateful for not only reducing my excess hiking miles, but the expertise that they have shared about their home regions!

In 2023, I finally joined one of the Get off the Couch hikes organized by Lee Augustine. It was so much fun to hike with a group who shared the same passion chasing the blaze. I loved the companionship and the meals shared after our hikes. It also introduced me to more fellow hikers I could reach out to for future hikes. I regret not joining the GOTC group sooner. Frankly, I thought they would be mostly slow hikers who wanted to ease into a hiking. I soon discovered that most of the people I hiked within the group would leave me in the dust!

As I approached the last half of 2023, I discovered that most of the trail segments that I needed to cover were in the northern regions of Wisconsin – four to five hours drive from home.

Thanks to many new hiking friends, I scheduled 3-day weekends. My trips often included camping, Airbnb, motels, and many evenings sharing a burger and brew at a local establishment!

I finished my Ice Age journey the last weekend in January, 2024 with Carolyn and college friend. My spouse and dog Sam joined us for the last two segments where we finished at the Eastern Terminus at Potawatomi State Park. It was a day of celebration despite some grumbling about the extra two miles we had to hike back to the parking area where my husband waited to pick us up! We celebrated over pizza at Sonny's in Sturgeon Bay.

My Ice Age hiking has brought me much joy and new friends. Every step brought me healing from a turbulent time in my life! Thank you for all who have maintained the trail and encouraged me along the way.

"He leads me beside still waters, he restores my soul." Psalm 23:2b