

Thousand-Miler Essay  
Carol Sandberg

On my 66th birthday, I started hiking the IAT at the Western Terminus. My plan was to finish by my 70th birthday. I had no idea what I was about to encounter. I didn't know what I didn't know. I had just learned about the IAT....lived in Wisconsin my whole life...and I "just" learned about the IAT. That seems so surreal to me now.

When I told my daughter about my goal, she said "Why are you doing this to yourself?" I answered, "I'm doing this FOR myself". Little did I realize what that really meant--what gifts I would receive from every hike".

I hiked every month so I could embrace the seasons and what each had to offer. The bitter cold, snow and ice, piercing wind, pelting rain, stifling humidity and the perfect day all made me feel very alive and blessed.

And if this wasn't enough, I was able to spend time hiking with friends and family that I might not have otherwise seen. And the Trail Angels and Chapter Coordinators were so kind and so encouraging! Eloise called me at night to make sure we had gotten home as a storm had hit the trail. Bob looked at his shoes, as if to see if they would fit my feet, when he heard me say that I had forgotten my shoes for the 12 mile hike!

And Butch. When he realized we had gone in the woods 15.2 miles the wrong way, he waited for us with a cooler of beverages on a very hot humid day, and took us back to our car.

I've been in all 50 states, but I have never hiked 1,140 miles in one state. My state.

I can't stop sharing my experiences with anyone who will listen about this treasure.

I just completed the IAT, two months before my 69th birthday.

What a gift.