

Maggie Courao
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HIKING OUR OWN HIKE

1119 miles

15 years

329 hikes

Average miles per hike 3.4

Average speed 1.5 miles per hour

70 Out and backs

71 Shuttle assists by trail angels

25 self bike shuttles

31 hiking partners

As my son Paul and I journeyed the Ice Age Trail, the most frequent advice we got from more experienced thousand milers was "hike your own hike". As noted above, we followed that advice. Thus our trail names, Turtle One and Turtle Two.

We set our turtle's pace in the very beginning, before the goal of hiking the entire trail even occurred to us, as we explored portions of intriguing segments nearby. Initially, we were slow partly due to the condition of my lungs after 35 years of smoking. I needed to stop at the top of each hill to catch my breath, and enjoyed long, welcome breaks at every bench. (Paul was a model of patience.)

Then, as now, I find it hard to both walk on a trail and look around. I'm usually looking at the ground so I don't trip on a rock or root. Therefore I stop a lot to see what I'm missing. I'm often reluctant to move on, as I feast my eyes, feel the mood of the place, look at the natural details. I'm always trying to capture with the camera what draws my eyes to the scene and touches me.

Once Paul and I decided the entire trail was something we would aim for, we started to follow the Facebook Thousand Miler Wannabe group, and began to join other hikers who welcomed others to join them. As we did so, it became apparent that although I thought I was moving along at a good pace, my fastest couldn't keep up with even those who described themselves as slow.

Our co-hikers were always remarkably patient with us. This included putting up with our tendency to forget and lose items, and the time it took us attending to things like applying sun screen and bug spray, and making adjustments for conditions. For example, it was awkward for us to put on spikes or snowshoes, and the orange safety vests sometimes went on upside down.

At the suggestion of trail angel Tess Mulrooney, I started an email list for others who were slow and liked short distance hiking. The list eventually grew to 50 people, and we made some wonderful connections. Among them was Karen McArdle, who wound up hiking with us 65 times. Karen was the epitome of laid-back and tolerant. She also makes a great martini at the end of the day.

- Maggie Carrao

Toward the end of our journey, Karen's brother, David Henning and his wife Glenda joined us for several hikes up north, as did several of the turtle email group. We were pretty compatible, as we were all curious about the natural world and liked taking pictures. None of them minded long breaks sitting on a log, or, if lucky, a bench. Sometimes we even had to stop and wait for the others!

Some people hike for exercise, some for the challenge, and some prefer to meander, like us. "Hike your own Hike". Paul and I are thousand milers at last. And we can truly say, we did it our way.