

Highlights of the Trail and General Schedule

Clint Bautz

My son, Alex and I came upon the Ice Age trail in the Southern Kettle Moraine Forest and after realizing that it was a 1200 mile National Scenic Trail that toured the entire state of Wisconsin, we said, 'let's give it a try!' He was 7 then and we were in the throes of the pandemic and needed something challenging to do. For several weeks, we came back to the Kettle Moraine, sometimes with my wife, and did out and back hikes through the hilly terrain and ticked off the miles. When I reached about 80 miles total, I realized that I could possibly do the entire trail so I made a plan to come up every few weekends, maybe stay in motels or camp and see how much I can do. At first, I only wanted to do the trail portions of the route and not do the road walks, but I found a lot of the road walks were on lovely country lanes that was kind of relaxing, so I expanded my ambition to do the whole trail. My son could not come with me all the time but he would join me when he did not have school - he has done about 600 miles with me.

I worked my way north and west simultaneously over about 18 months. During the snowy, cold months I typically did the road walks to try and knock them out so I can connect my gaps in the route with trail walks in better weather. I found autumn to be the best time to walk as all the bugs are gone and the tick danger is much less than the summer months and its beautiful with the changing leaves. I found spring to be hit or miss with the snow and damp conditions.

I reached the Eastern Terminus on my birthday in 2022 and started to focus my walks further west. I started to get better luck with shuttles as I moved north of Madison (out of Uber zone) and met many cool folks who shuttled me. I decided on the Western bifurcation simply because the route was location adjacent to our hotel at the Dells, so on one day I walked north to Adams from the hotel (30+ miles a record) and then on the next day, I walked from the hotel south to Baraboo and finished the walk a little buzzed after my stops at Driftless Glen, Balanced Rock Winery, and finally Tumbled Rock Brewery. In the winter of 2022/23, I made a run at finishing all of the major road walks with the one from Chippea Moraine to Southern Blue Hills completed in February of this year with a ride from Vickie Christensen on a very cold day.

As the weather warmed, I started doing my final run of segments in June of this year and knocked out all of the Western segments I had not completed including Lumbercamp and Kettle Bowl, Avril Kelly, the Chippeawa/Cornell Are segments, and the Blue Hills. Once in Rice Lake, I stated to get Minnesota radio stations so I know I was close. From August-October I made regular trips to finish out the remaining segments with St Croix Falls slated as the last one. I wanted to make sure I finished before the weather turned. October 17th, around 11 AM, I walked down to the Western terminus on the beautiful St Croix River.

Favorite Segments

The standouts for me are Underdown, Harrison Hills, Mondeaux, Turtle Rock, McKenzie Creek, Straight Lake, Monches, Brooklyn Wildlife, Parnell, Greenbush, Gibraltar Rock, and Milton, but there are many more. It seemed like each segment got better and better as I went along.

Favorite Towns

I liked all of the towns I stayed in. If I had to pick one town that I really got to know, it would be Antigo. Antigo was the base of operations for a few trips. The trail almost circles the town, so it's a natural trail community. I stayed in 2 different hotels, hung out at the bowling alley, ate at both supper clubs, visited the historic museum, and much more.

I spent a lot of time in Luck, Merrill, Cornell (did not stay there but ate at both ice cream places), walked in on a Bluegrass festival in Medford, enjoyed the gouda cheese in Thorpe, hearing wolves howl while camping in Rib Lake, Stevens Point (good beer), Coloma (also strategically located), Cross Plains (to visit the headquarters), New Glarus (also good beer), Janesville (great park system), Milton, Eagle, Hartland, Slinger, West Bend, Kewaskum, Elkhart Lake, Manitowoc, and Two Rivers.

Best Moments

Having a beer at the laundromat in Merrill while drying my clothes after a long day of hiking in the rain on Harrison Hills.

Watching the sunset through the trees at Council Grounds state park.

Hiking in the pre-dawn light along Straight River

Doing my first 20 Mile Hike along Albany segment – lost over 50 pounds in 2022!

Hiking with Wife and Son over several weekends.

Meeting locals at taverns and restaurants- everyone was nice to me, even with me being from Illinois.

Worst Moments

Not many but I did manage to fall backward into a fire pit while helping an RV back into a camping spot. That was in Shell Lake and I broke a rib which delayed my finish about a month.

Being worried about chest pains but realizing it was just my rib joints aching from a long road walk.

Having 100 ticks climb all over me on Lumber Camp – loved the segment other than that.

Getting caught out in a huge thunderstorm on the Harwood Lake Segment

Simplified Itinerary

2021

I started hiking in March of 2021 and most of the segments were in Kettle Moraine Southern Unit. I worked my way North to Laphram Peak and West towards Janesville in alternating day trips from Chicago. During the summer while in the Dells, I decided to go ahead and knock out the western bifurcation so I did Baraboo to Adams in two epic road walks, I still needed to walk from Adams to Coloma to finish the bifurcation but most of it was done. My son and I also completed Walk the Wauk in the Fall of 2021. I jumped around from the Eastern and Central parts of the trail (far out app) and completed some segments up north such as Parrish Hills, where I met Sanjay Shoney and Hiked Summit Moraine, Highland Lakes + connecting routes later in the year. By the end of the year I had completed an arc of walking from Elkhart Lake in the North to Cross Plains west with a few of the Northern segments mentioned above and the western bifurcation.

2022

I completed the road walks and segments North of Elkhart Lake to the eastern terminus which I reached on June 26, 2022. We also started making progress north from the central part of the state. We moved north of Madison to Merrimac and crossed the river on the ferry. My son and I did the Devils Lake area trails and eventually finished the long road walk from Adams to Coloma to finish the bifurcation. We had Allison Young shuttle us around the Waupaca/Stevens Point Area and completed a number of segments and very long road walks. I connected with GOTC hiking group and visited the new cedar lake segment and hiked the road walks all the way up to Hatley where Ringle Started. Yolanda DeLouch who I believe is writing a book about her experiences on the IAT shuttled me on Ringle. My son and I came back a few weeks later and Bruce Davis shuttled us on Plover River and Dells of the Eau Claire. I skipped around a few segments based on shuttle availability and did Harrison Hills, Grandfather Falls, Underdown and others. Buzz Meyer shuttled me a few weeks later in late September early October on the segments near Rib Lake. I made it as far west at Mondeaux Esker. I took a break for a few months but came back up north to complete all of the road walks and made it all the way to Cornell. Still had trail segments to the east but there was already too much snow for me to walk. I made one more walk for the year and that was the CR from Plover River to Lumbercamp which I did with IAT staff Lisa Szela.

2023

I did 2 more road walk segments early 2023 which knocked out all of my major road walks. I also knocked out Tuscobia in the snow and the walk between Blue Hills and Chippewa. I came back up north in June around my birthday and did the tick infested Lumbercamp and Kettlebowl using Antigo as a base. I came back up a week later, July 7th – 9th and did Turtle Rock, Avril Kelly, Jerry Lake and Lake 11. Two weeks later I came back and did Chippewa Moraine to Firth Lake. We came back again first week of August and did the Blue Hills segments. At the end of August I came back to what would be my third to last trip but after hiking Sand Creek, I fell and broke my rib in a campfire pit so I had to get well and come back. 2 weeks later, I came back and knocked out Timberland Hills, Bear Lake, and Grassy Lake. I came back again first week of October and knocked out Straight Lake to McKenzie Creek. I also did some

of Gandy dancer so I can experience Café Wren. Then, last week I went back and finished Gandy Dancer and St Croix – done!