Marquette County was entirely covered by the Green Bay Lobe. The region is part of the central sands of Wisconsin. The county is mostly undeveloped, with pine and oak forests and extensive grass marshes. The mucky-peat soils of these marshes owe their origin to two major geologic events. The glacier ice, advancing across east central Wisconsin, gouged out the original basins. Then water from the melting glaciers transformed them into lake basins. The lake basins were sandy along the beach areas, but the deep-water areas had fine water-sorted deposits. As the climate warmed, vegetation started to encroach upon the water areas. Over the last 13,000 years, sedges and marsh grasses slowly replaced the water areas. The wet environment of the marsh inhibits the decomposition of these plant remains, so it accumulates. The organic soils we see today are simply decayed plant residue accumulated over thousands of years. Each winter, another layer of dead plants is added. Research on bogs in Wisconsin shows that these organic soils form at a rate of about one inch every 40 years. Some marshes in the area have an organic layer more than ten feet thick.

John Muir, known as the father of America’s National Parks, grew up on a farm near Fountain Lake, now called Ennis Lake, in an area that had been home to the Winnebagos. It now is the site of a national historic landmark, state natural area and county park. The Trail segment mostly surrounds the lake and highlights the landscape where Muir developed a profound love for nature. Although the county has few off-road Ice Age Trail miles, it has plenty of other places of interest to explore, such as Page Creek Marsh State Natural Area and Observatory Hill State Natural Area, a site often visited by Muir.

The National Park Service, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and Marquette County have started the planning process for determining the future Ice Age Trail corridor through the county. It will be several years before the Ice Age Trail corridor will be determined.

CHAPTER INFORMATION

The Marquette County Chapter focuses on (i) supporting IATA activities, Trail maintenance and advocacy for the Ice Age Trail corridor planning process; (ii) building outdoor family traditions by planning a variety of Trail-related events and (iii) developing relationships with community organizations with interests in health, conservation and preservation. The chapter has created the John Muir...
Park Ice Age Trail Guide that enhances a hiker’s experience in the park. It is available from the Marquette County Chapter’s home page on the IATA website.

COUNTY INFORMATION

Marquette County Convention and Visitors Bureau:
  travelmarquetecounty.com

Marquette County Information: co.marquette.wi.us

Sunset over Ennis Lake on the John Muir Park Segment.
John Muir Park Segment  (Atlas Map 56f-E; Databook page 52)

SNAPSHOT

1.8 miles: CTH-F to John Muir Memorial County Park entrance drive

This segment highlights the boyhood playground of John Muir, “Father of the National Parks.”

Note: New Ice Age Trail is planned south of John Muir Memorial County Park. Check with the Ice Age Trail Alliance (800-227-0046, iceagetrail.org) for details.

From Ennis Lake.

In John Muir Memorial County Park.

One ColdCache site on segment.

TRAIL ACCESS AND PARKING

CTH-F: From Portage, take STH-33 north. At CTH-F turn left and continue north 10.4 mi. The parking area is on the west side of the road (N1595 CTH-F).

John Muir Memorial County Park Entrance Drive: From Portage, take STH-33 north. At CTH-F turn left and continue north 10.0 mi. The park is on the east side of the road and has a large parking area.

THE HIKE

On this segment hikers will explore and experience the land that was the boyhood home of John Muir and that made such a positive and lifelong impression on the eminent naturalist and founder of the Sierra Club. Portions of the segment pass across land that was homesteaded in 1849 by the Ennis and Muir families; the Muirs lived on the northeast side of Ennis Lake, known as Fountain Lake at the time, from 1849 to 1856. Although John Muir traveled all over the world, he never forget his family homestead and tried several times to buy and preserve it. He said, “Even if I should never see it again, the beauty of its lilies and orchids is so pressed into my mind, I shall always enjoy looking back at them in imagination, even across the seas and continents and perhaps after I am dead.”

The segment passes through prairie and meadows that fill with wildflowers in the summer, features views of picturesque Ennis Lake and passes through and by open oak forests, sedge meadows and fens bordered by tamarack and bog birch. It begins at CTH-F near the parking area, which is a site on the Marquette County John Muir Nature and History Route and includes interpretive signage regarding the Eggleston Family, farming and John Muir’s boyhood home. The segment crosses CTH-F into the IATA’s Muir Preserve and travels east through a field that is being converted into a prairie. The segment then turns south and follows a tree line between another field and sedge meadow before reaching Gillette Drive.

Crossing Gillette Drive, the segment enters Muir Park State Natural Area (SNA) and climbs to the top of a rise with outstanding panoramic views of Ennis Lake, a spring-fed 30-acre kettle lake occupying a marshy pocket in a ground moraine. The segment follows along the edge of a mesic prairie and shortly inter-
sects (MQ4) a blue-blazed trail that heads around the north side of Ennis Lake to the John Muir Memorial County Park parking area.

From here the segment begins to circle around the eastern and southern shores of Ennis Lake. Trailside benches offer hikers the chance to enjoy the natural surroundings and contemplate the rich history of the area. Many unusual and rare plants can be found in Muir Park SNA, and a guide is available on the Marquette County Chapter’s home page on the IATA website (iceagetrail.org/volunteer/chapters/marquette-county).

The segment crosses the rich fen that surrounds the lake’s eastern inlet on a boardwalk bridge. The calcareous fen and surrounding prairies contain a diversity of unusual and rare species. The segment then curves around the southern end of the lake. The bog near the lake’s southeast corner offers the right environs for the northern wet forest dominated by tamarack, poison sumac and bog birch, with numerous pitcher plants beneath. Continuing on, the Trail eventually crosses the fen surrounding the western outlet of the lake on another boardwalk bridge and enters John Muir Memorial County Park, quickly reaching the segment’s endpoint at the park entrance.

Several memorials to John Muir exist in the park: a granite monument, a wooden sign and an extensive informational display near the parking area. There is also an exhibit on his life at the Montello Museum (55 West Montello Street). But the parks and preserve are likely the best memorial to the man; hikers can literally walk in Muir’s footsteps and see a landscape that has changed little since he lived here.

AREA SERVICES

Montello: Restaurant, grocery store, convenience store, lodging, camping, library, medical service. From John Muir Memorial County Park, go north on CTH-F 7.8 mi. At STH-22 (Main St.) turn left and continue north for 0.8 mi. Area info available from the Montello Area Chamber of Commerce (608-297-7420, montellowi.com).

Portage: See Portage Canal Segment, p. 186. From John Muir Memorial County Park go south ~10 mi. Also see Trail Access and Parking directions, above.
Map 56f-E
Marquette and Columbia counties
Includes Fox River, French Creek State Wildlife Area, and John Muir Memorial County Park

John Muir Park Segment 1.8 mi
Must-Have Ice Age Trail Books!

The Ice Age Trail Guidebook features more than 100 detailed segment-by-segment descriptions and maps to help you connect with the thousand-mile Ice Age National Scenic Trail. Written for those seeking a wide range of adventures on the Ice Age Trail.

The Ice Age Trail Atlas is a set of 105 color, shaded relief-style maps at 1:48,000 scale. In contrast to the smaller map excerpts in the Ice Age Trail Guidebook, each map in this package is printed on an 8.5” x 11” sheet and includes not just the Ice Age Trail route but also a wider snapshot of the area around the Trail.

Both books were written and published by the Ice Age Trail Alliance. All proceeds for each book help build and maintain the Ice Age Trail. Please call the IA TA at (800) 227-0046 with any questions.

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