

Almost exactly 1 year ago I picked up *Thousand Miler: Adventures Hiking the Ice Age Trail* by Melanie McManus at a thrift store while visiting my great grandmother's cabin near Rhinelander, Wi. I was about to enter a large transitional phase of my life. I was working and living in Madison, Wi for the past 7 years and was ready to move out of the state. Before reading this book, I had never considered hiking a long trail, backpacking, or becoming a thru-hiker. I knew I was planning on leaving the state of Wisconsin and figured a thru-hike would be a good way to appreciate the state and pay my dues of gratitude. In the book, Melanie mentions some folks that hiked the Arizona Trail. This trail interested me too and it was "shorter", so I decided that would be a good shake out. I collected gear that would work for both. The AZT had many gear list resources; whereas, the IAT, not so much. The AZT was my first backpacking trip ever and became my baseline expectation for a long trail. There were a few things I added to my base weight before the trail that was different from the AZT: permethrin, bug net, bear bag (ursack), safety orange (hat and a piece of fabric for the back of my pack), and a reflective vest for road walking. Once I was on the IAT, I quickly realized some flaws in my assumptions of long trails.

1. Permethrin only halfway works, and you need to carry bug spray too. I didn't know. When I got to Luck, Wi, bug spray was the first thing I added to my kit.
2. It's hard to dry things out. Between the rain, morning dew, fording creeks/wetlands, humidity, and sweat. For a handful of days my feet were looking rough and by rough I mean they were pruned and very painful to hike on. I couldn't get my shoes to dry out. (It's not dry here like it is in Arizona.) There was one night in Rib Lake that I threw my shoes in the dryer at the laundry mat knowing very well it was going to rain the entire next day. The boost to moral of having dry shoes for 12 hours was so worth it. I made a change to my kit in Antigo. I added a pair of hiking sandals! These sandals served me well. I wore them in the morning until the morning dew had dried to save my socks and shoes from getting wet. When I was getting a shuttle back to the trail from Rib Lake from Buzz, I told him that this hike was closure on my Wisconsin life chapter. He was quick to say the hike would convince me to stay. At the time, moral was super low since dealing with rain and trench foot, but after the rain stopped and I hiked further West, he was right. I found myself starting to daydream about buying property in northern Wisconsin. This is when I really started to appreciate the trail in its entirety. I started calling this a celebration hike. Fueled by apples, blackberries, raspberries, and of course beer. A fresh fruit snack on the trail and throwing a couple beers back on the connecting routes. It was 100 percent Wisconsin. I got to share my

story and experience with many locals. Everyone was so curious to hear about the trail and what I was doing. Asking me about my wildlife encounters or how many miles I was putting in that day. My favorite parts of the trail while on actual trail would have to be the wildlife I saw and the wildflowers. I saw 3 bears, deer including 1 albino deer, a beaver, a million frogs, a million slugs, garden snakes, turkeys, peacocks, pheasants, swans, cranes, turtles, snails, and fish. The Ice Age Trail was an adventure. It is an experience I'll hold dear to my heart forever. I hope to come back someday and hike it East to West.

Holly Pfaff