

## Thousand-Miler Essay

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This is my third completion of the Ice Age Trail. I have been asked numerous times “Why do you keep hiking the trail?” I usually have trouble coming up with an answer. I want to say to the person “Why would I stop doing something that I like doing?” or “Why would I spend all this time hiking the Ice Age Trail and then just quit?” I spent some time thinking about why I keep hiking the trail (because there’s a lot of time to think when you’re hiking 1000 miles) and came up with an answer.

The easy answer is that I am a very active individual and I do some sort of activity almost every single day of the week. I would rather be outside than inside and hiking is something fun that I can do outside no matter what time of year it is. It fits in very easily amongst all the other things I do. I also like setting and achieving goals, and hiking the trail consists of so many goals to check off.

Planning hikes and traveling throughout the state on a regular basis isn’t easy and could be a deterrent to why someone may stop hiking. I’ve hiked portions of the Appalachian Trail and I really enjoyed it, but it takes at least 12 hours to get Georgia and I have to travel even farther if I want to go to another state. I can hike a portion of the Ice Age Trail any day that I want and the drive time ranges from 15 minutes to four hours, so I don’t feel the amount of travel can be an excuse for not hiking the trail.

What I have finally come to realize is that the Ice Age Trail has become a part of who I am. I have lived in Wisconsin my entire life, but I have learned so much about the state during the past five years. Hiking the trail has given me the opportunity to discover Wisconsin and see many beautiful places. I love photography and there’s so much to photograph when hiking during all the seasons. I have met people while hiking who have become good friends and I wouldn’t have met them without the trail. Being part of the Ice Age Trail has also given me the opportunity to teach others about the trail, share something I love, and give back by being a volunteer. Continuing to hike the IAT just makes sense to me. We are so lucky to have a trail like this in Wisconsin and there’s always something new to see or experience when I go out hiking.

That’s my serious answer to why I keep hiking the trail. The not so serious answer is that I haven’t hiked every section in the rain, so it looks like I’ll be hiking for a while.