

Hiking the ice age trail has taken me to many places in Wisconsin that I probably would have never thought to visit. I enjoyed discovering different areas of our state and each of the segments. The unfamiliar roads became familiar with each segment hike, and I looked forward to the beauty of nature that the IAT offered.

I started my official IAT hiking on December 26, 2021, with my daughter on the stony ridge segment. Not knowing what we were doing then, we should have paid more attention to the yellow blazes, and a 6-mile out and back became 8.4 miles. Learning more, we completed the eagle segment out and in, thinking this would be how I would hike each part. When the scuppernon segment took me three trials to complete this way, I knew I would have to find some group hikes. I joined some groups with the intent of tagging along. I had the privilege of meeting some wonderful new friends, so we were able to meet up for segments, and I was able to complete the trail. I ended up hiking less than 10% of the trail solo.

Working full-time, I had planned to take four to five years to complete the trail. I went on the trail consistently in the fall of 2022; one great-weather weekend turned into several. Also, thinking I could not hike throughout the winter in anticipation of storms, “just one more weekend” became many as the weather ironically cooperated. When the snow hit the segments, I completed the connection routes, and shorter hikes became longer as the driving distances increased. The spring of 2023 let me finish the trail.

My favorite segments had water on them, a beauty break during a hike I looked forward to the anticipation of running into wildlife. I was surprised to see porcupines in Wisconsin. I had two bear sightings, both in a car which seemed close enough. Several deer, raccoons, a skunk, fishers, and grouses were always a surprise to see. My most memorable but scary animal sighting

was seeing a bobcat running towards me on the Kewaunee River segment on a solo hike; I managed to blow a whistle, so he ran off.

I finished my journey on a connecting route, the best one, the Merrimac ferry, on June 23, 2023. While I have completed all the segments, my IAT hiking will continue. I want to go back and revisit my favorite pieces at different times of the year. The IAT is a hidden gem to me and others that have had the opportunity to explore it.

Jane Betlej

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