

## My Hike on the Ice Age Trail

Unlike most people that hike the Ice Age Trail, I had no intention of hiking the whole trail. I live near the Montrose and Brooklyn segments so, for many years I have hiked those segments and a couple of other ones that are close to my home. I eventually met several other people that had some interest in hiking a few segments that were further away. We started to hike together and like a fish, the IAT reeled me in and I was hooked! I chose to be a section-hiker and not a through hiker due to time constraints and responsibilities. The mileage is the same but, I could take my time. Once I set my mind to completing the trail, it became an addiction.

I hiked fifty percent of the trail with one person that I met in a dog agility class. We became friends and I enjoyed every mile on the trail with her. Twenty percent was with other people and small groups, such as, Get Off the Couch. The last thirty percent was solo. I used Uber, family, and friends to shuttle me so I would only have to hike one way. However, I also have had to hike out and backs when I could not find shuttles.

Most days on the trail were spectacular but, I have also had a couple of horrible ones. One day I became ill due to the heat and had trouble getting back to my car. I had my first ever flat tire and another time, the car became stuck in a ditch. Luckily, when the car was stuck, a local farmer came by and pulled the car out. It was enjoyable talking to the farmer and he had been out baiting bears so that was interesting. When the tire was flat, a local business sold me a used tire and got me on my way within an hour. There are wonderful people in the world that will help you out when you need it.

Spectacular days became the norm on the trail. To start with, the scenery on most of the segments was amazing. I hiked all four seasons so I was able to enjoy all the weather conditions Wisconsin has to offer. From the buds in spring to the frozen water crossings in winter, I was able to enjoy it all. Second, the hikers that I met were amazing. I met people that hike fast and their goal is to finish as quickly as they can. I met others who struggled to complete just one segment such as, a woman with MS. I made friendships that will last a lifetime and acquaintances that touched my soul. Third, I got to know the Wisconsin that I have lived in all my life. I went to towns that I have heard of but never been to. I saw amazing glacier features and visited a few state parks as well as, beautiful local parks. I went to remote areas that I didn't know people could visit. I can only imagine what Wisconsin was like ten thousand years ago.

The fauna and flora of the trail are stunning! I saw so many birds and animals and each time I was amazed. Even the signs of animals stunned me. In one area I was hiking, I noticed two sets of wolf tracks that continued for over half a mile along a logging road until I came to an opening in the forest where a whole pack had gathered. Looking at all the tracks and trying to interpret them was a sight I will never forget. The large bear tracks that meandered down a trail was fun to compare to my foot. I got real excited when a small cub's tracks joined the large ones. Eagles, owls, woodpeckers, chipmunks, Trumpeter Swans, red squirrels, grouse, and so many more were abundant. The flora of the prairies with all the flowers and grasses was so different than that of the forests. Watching the change of seasons through the plant life was spectacular. With the color of the changing leaves to the color of the flowering prairies, I enjoyed each season.

I have also had a lot of "firsts" while hiking the IAT. For many people, the things that were firsts for me are daily activities. I took my first Uber ride on the Milton segment. I stayed in my first Airbnb in Cornell. Driving hundreds of miles to hike eight miles was a first. I visited many places

for the first time, including trail communities. I tried to spend money in each one by filling up my gas tank, staying overnight, or eating in a local diner. Another first occurred when a man shot his rifle near me, the bullets landed within 25 yards of where I was hiking. I actually saw a bullet kick up dirt. Thankfully, there were three of us hiking so when we met up with him we were in a group. Hiking alone in remote areas was a first. I had always hiked with someone and, for an older female it can be nerve racking. I was more worried about falling and getting hurt with no cell service than any animals, two or four legged!

I enjoyed hiking most trail segments. I kept a journal and after each hike, I would list at least three positive things about each. The connecting routes are another story. Some I liked, others I didn't. It is too bad that there are so many road miles but, I understand the process of acquiring land is slow. My shoe soles actually melted on several long road hikes and I got blisters from the heat radiating from the asphalt, that was also a first! I tried to make the best of it but, when you have long stretches to cover and dogs chasing you the fun goes out of it. I think I feared the dogs on the connecting routes more than anything else.

One of the best things about hiking the trail was the alone time it gave me to meditate and think. Even when I hiked with others, my mind was free to wander. I had no worries except to make it to the end of each segment or connecting route. I spent more time in the moment taking in my surroundings and not thinking about tomorrow. That alone is worth gold!